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THE PARVENU

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THE PARVENU FAMILY;

OR,

PHŒBE: GIRL AND WIFE.

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD,

AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," "NEVER FORGOTTEN," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE PARVENU FAMILY;

OR,

PHŒBE: GIRL AND WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

CONJUGAL TROUBLES.

WITH Phœbe, as we have seen, the staving off a debt was equivalent to its extinction; and the occasion of any rescue from danger was the subject of jubilation. Nothing so goaded Mr. Pringle as these little bursts of Phœbe's, or made him so impatient. Her good spirits on these occasions were so natural and genuine that he was again and again taken in, as it were, and

led to believe that she had some piece of good news for him.

"Now," she would say, in her cosy way, "didn't I tell you so? As Tom says, you don't understand that we are really very well off, after all!"

This allusion to Tom—whom he now had begun to look on as a sort of policeman—was certain to make the storm burst. Then came the thunder, and the pitiless, cutting blast; and in a few moments Phœbe was in her room, in a passionate state of wounded grief and indignation, vowing that she would never make an exertion to please one who was so unkind and cruel.

Mrs. Dawson saw all that was going on with the greatest clearness; and, plain, practical woman as she was, resolved to let matters work themselves out, as a sort of useful discipline. Being, moreover, a comfortable lady, and fond of her ease, she did not wish to know too much, and

assumed that everything was going on pretty well, and that they were only wrangling at first, as she herself had done, and as all young married folk must do. She had her own friends with claims upon her, as she considered it; or, as they might have put it, upon whom she asserted her claims of hospitality. As she had now no companion to lighten the dull evenings, the restoratives of visitings and junketings were more necessary for her than ever.

At one of these houses she met her old friend Lord Garterley, who asked in a friendly way after Phœbe, and, with a renewed warmth, declared that he would go and see her so soon as he came to town.

Phœbe was enchanted one morning when the white head and pink face found their way to her little drawing-room; displayed all her smiles and piquancy; and, in her thoughtless way, gave him quite a flourishing account of their situation. She was, in truth, only thinking of how she was

behaving, and how she was impressing her visitor, for this poor little lady could never bring her mind to look beyond the existing moment. Accordingly, when Mr. Pringle came in after one of his weary tramps, "looking for something" (Tom, in allusion to these lonely walks, had facetiously told him that he had got him the office of "Inspector of Public Buildings"), Phœbe had one of her little "surprises" for him.

"It's all right!" she cried; "who do you think has been here? and I was so nice and charming to him."

A dim notion darted into the luckless fellow's brain, that this must refer to his offended parent. "What," he said eagerly, "do you mean——"

"You foolish fellow, you think that I am a child, and can do nothing. And, what's more, he is coming to dine to-day. What do you say to Lord Garterley? There!"

His face fell. But he had now found it useless to rage, so he turned away, biting his lips.

"Then entertain him yourself," he said at last, "as you have chosen to ask him."

"I don't think he would object to that," said Phœbe, looking at herself in the glass with a pleased simper. "I assure you he was quite gallant to-day. He paid me such nice compliments."

He turned impatiently away, and tried hard to keep himself calm. She had that power over him, at least, that she had inspired him with a certain dread of the inconvenience that attended such scenes.

"What did you say to him? Did you say anything of the way we were in?"

"What way?" she said innocently. "Of course not. I was not going to be so foolish as that. I took care to keep ourselves up before him. I made him think,"

added she, with a profoundly sagacious air, "that we were quite rich."

"Child! idiot! you did that?" cried he, with a sad disregard of conjugal decorum.

"Don't call me those names," said Phœbe, colouring. "I am not accustomed to it. I know who is considered a child by the men."

"Yes," sneered Mr. Pringle; "that blackguard brother of yours, I suppose—"

"You can't help this sort of language," said Phœbe, trembling; "it's the fault of your low belongings."

She could have "cut off her tongue" after she made this speech, and felt deeply humiliated at having condescended to pick up such "a handful of mud." Alas! for poor human nature, she was a little comforted when she saw that it had had due effect.

This recrimination was as idle in its results as the others of the same pattern,

but it will be seen how "the little rift within the lute" was widening into a huge crack. On his side there was no use protesting. Lord Garterley was to come to dinner, and must be entertained in the best way they could. Something, he thought, might be done by working on that nobleman. He tried to get Phœbe to understand what was all-important, and in a half-shy, half-gruff fashion, pointed out to her that she might remind that lord of his promises and honeyed words. Phœbe was sharp enough to detect the secret cause of his hesitation.

"I wonder," she said scornfully, "you could ask a child to make such a request. Can't you ask for yourself like other men."

However, a suitable repast was prepared, at a serious cost. Tom fortunately came in, and with his usual generosity pressed a "fiver" into his Phib's hand, and bid her do the thing handsomely. Phœbe herself

took nearly a couple of hours in dressing, and came down with all her trinkets on, and in chains of gold, like a little captive. The rooms were all lit up, and the whole had really the air of a prosperous establishment, sustained by plenty of money.

Lord Garterley was in high spirits and good-humour. He "rallied" Phœbe on her looks, found the delicacies and wines excellent, talked about old friends and old times, declared he must have them down to Garterley, and that they must fix a day for the visit. Phœbe was enchanted, and already saw herself ordering an entirely new stock of dresses at Madame Mélanie's. She, indeed, became so exhilarated that she was carried away into talking of their position —of her "wanting *him* to buy a carriage for her." Lord Garterley listened to this prattle with much amusement, and encouraged her to tell him more of her plans. He then asked about the "pitiless parents," as he styled the Pringle family, which convulsed

the young hostess, who called them "nasty cruel people." She then retired to her drawing-room, quite pleased with herself, thinking that she had exhibited real powers of diplomacy, and shown Mr. Pringle what she could do. When the latter was left with Lord Garterley, he was to find the fruits of the diplomacy.

"You are doing well, I see," said the nobleman. "I was afraid that what I heard was true. But you are all right."

Mr. Pringle's brow darkened. "There's the folly of it!" he said, "she don't understand it. We have little or nothing."

"Get along!" said his lordship; "that's the way all rich people talk. You and your sharp brother-in-law have been putting your heads together, and knocking some money out of the public." And he looked with a good-humoured smile across the claret that he was holding in his glass.

At that moment came a sound of a loud and angry voice from the hall, very vociferous and threatening.

"Lord bless me! What's that?" said Lord Garterley.

Mr. Pringle turned pale. He knew those tones well. They belonged to the terrible "furniture man," who had been to him like Faust's terrible master—now soothed, now propitiated with a small sum, only to return more insolent and intolerant than ever. As the hired waiter opened the door softly, the voice came in with him:

"If he can be giving dinners to lords, he should pay for the chairs and tables they sit on!"

This speech was heard by Lord Garterley, who discreetly rose up and said:

"I had better go to the drawing-room and 'join the ladies,' as they say."

And he got up; and with a cautious air, as though he too felt the influence of the

presence of a dunning tradesman, left the hapless owner of the mansion to face the enemy. The despairing, even agonising, face struck him with compassion. He came back.

"I heard what he said. I suppose you are pressed by these tradesmen?"

With an almost ghastly smile the hapless young man said:

"I am at the last. We have nothing. My father has cast me off. I dare say I shall be turned out of this house in a few days."

The astonishment that came into the peer's face was most genuine.

"But she talked of buying a carriage and other things?"

"She knows nothing, and will know nothing. It makes me despair. I have to face it all, while she——" and he glanced up to the ceiling. This was most significant. It was as though he said, "She dresses and prattles away as you see."

"Bless me!" said the other, bewildered, and sitting down again. "You must tell me about this. But wait a bit;" and he got up and went out of the room. After a few moments' talking the hall-door was shut, and he returned.

There was something almost tragic, or rather pathetic, in the contrast between what was going on in the two floors of this hapless domicile—the pretty unconscious child, who was sitting in her sort of Fairyland above, wondering why the gentlemen were so long coming up, and the wretchedness of the imposture that was below.

"I can do very little for any one," said Lord Garterley. "I am ashamed to mention this to you; but I have a little interest in one of the banks."

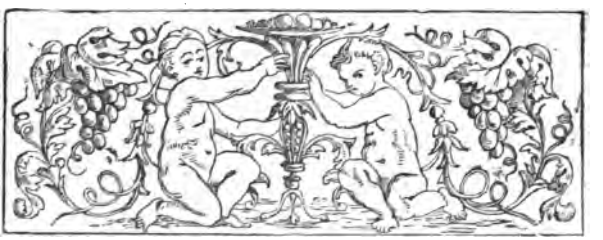
"Anything!" said the other eagerly.

"A clerk's place, seventy pounds a year. Reflect."

Mr. Pringle was silent.

"Well, we shall see about something else later on. And when I next go down to your people—they are always asking me—I will speak to them seriously about you. They can't let their son be reduced to this state of destitution. And you will forgive me for advising—it seems unkind—but I would give up this sort of thing. Get into a smaller house. But don't visit it on her; be gentle with her; she is very young. No: I won't go up. You will say good-night to her for me."

Meanwhile the little lady of the house, still smiling, wondered why on earth the gentlemen did not come up.



CHAPTER II.

A CRISIS.

THIS state of things could not go on very long. Lord Garterley was one of those epicureans on whom anything like poverty or "difficulties" operated disagreeably. It gave him painful impressions, and quite routed the little poetical world of fancies in which he lived. He could understand the genuine poor, and to them was really charitable; but, to take the instance of Phœbe, her difficulties completely altered the appearance she wore in his eyes. She had been turned into prose, and to prose of the worst kind.

For the next few days the recollection of that scene weighed on him most disagreeably—not, too, without a compassion which interfered with his other enjoyments. So he made haste to speak to his banker friend—to get rid of the whole business—who said, in that general way which is so significant of nothing particular, that he would certainly keep the matter in mind, and that if anything offered he would let him know. Lord Garterley, having thus done his duty, dismissed the matter, and turned to some new and charming persons whom he had just met, and whom he "must have down to Garterley at once."

That night had not been without its effect on poor Phœbe, who was a little scared at what had taken place, and in an indistinct way began to realise that there were gloomy times in store for them all. Most directly did she seem to be affected by Lord Garterley going away in that

abrupt and rude manner, without coming up "to join the ladies." She had her dress and trinkets so nicely arranged, and her pretty speeches settled.

"I would have asked him," she said, "to make you something or other at Garterley. He could not have refused me. He is so rich—seven or eight hundred a year is nothing to him."

"For heaven's sake stop,!" cried her husband, putting his hands to his head. "Stop this perpetual chatter of yours! Are you mad, or an idiot, that you go on worrying me in this way?"

"Ungentlemanly!" answered poor Phœbe, "always ungentlemanly."

Indeed they were nearer the edge of the precipice than they knew. Mr. Pringle had reached the stage when, grown desperate, he made no further exertion, and was content to let things take their course —when he found, too, some satisfaction in saying to his Phœbe,

"Never mind! Only wait a little, then you'll find out. You'll pay for all this, and I shall enjoy it."

Unfortunately, just at this time a "run of ill luck" had overtaken Tom, as in the end it does all such clever fellows; and it seemed as though everything he did, and everything he touched, failed him. He lost all his bets; his fortune at billiards and other games of skill deserted him; and one evening, when it had grown dusk, he drove up mysteriously to say good-bye to his sister.

"The game is up for the present, Phib, and I must keep away for a time."

"What! ruined at last?" said Mr. Pringle, with satisfaction; "is that the end of it?"

Tom, for a long time, had known as well as if he had been told it of the treatment his darling sister was experiencing. He had only been prevented from interfering, by the feeling that it might do her

further harm. He was glad now of an opportunity of giving, not a bit, but the whole of his mind.

"Let me tell you, I shall not be so far away as but that I can reach you; and let me warn you now—I know of your doings, and if—"

"Tom! Tom!" cried Phœbe piteously. "Don't! He is very good."

The poor soul had now learned that such interferences were anything but profitable.

"Go on with your threatenings," said the other. "You're a fine example to set up preaching."

"Never you mind," said Tom. "Look at her face; it's quite pinched and worn. You're not treating her well. You had better change this game in time."

"She's been complaining, I suppose?"

"No; she'd die first. But you don't understand her. She's too good for you. But see, take my warning; treat her

well—kindly, affectionately—or I'll come back, and make you smart for every harsh word. Mind, I mean what I say. I'll come on you when you won't expect me. So take care. There, Phib;" and he squeezed into her little hand some notes that he could ill spare, to the amount of some forty or fifty pounds. Then, without waiting for thanks, and dropping his threatening tone, he said, in a friendly way, "Good-bye, old fellow. Let me hear good accounts of you."

After this scene, it may be conceived that Mr. Pringle was not in an amiable humour with his spouse. Phœbe, too, was not a little defiant and excited by this support, and said to him, in her curious way:

"Now you'll try and be good, won't you, and mind what Tom says? If you promise to turn over a new leaf I'll forgive you all that you have done, and the way you have treated me. You see, everybody

is remarking my looks. So you must promise me."

This indiscreet speech had the opposite effect to what was intended.

"Forgive me? You? After all you have done to me—sunk me, ruined me, in every way! No matter, you shall pay for it yet!"

"You had better take care," she said, with heightening colour; "if you are threatening me I shall call Tom back;" and she tossed her head with defiance.

He could hardly trust himself to speak, but with a trembling voice said—and he knew that this speech would punish her most effectively:

"Go out of my sight! I am beginning to hate you. I wish I had never set eyes on you."

Phœbe, who had already forgotten all that had gone before, seemed terror-stricken at this declaration.

"No! no! You don't really mean that

you don't wish that you had never seen me?"

"I do. It was an unlucky day that I met you."

She then almost pleaded:

"And you wish that our meetings at the school—those delightful, stolen meetings, to which I look back—"

"Ugh!" he said, with a purposely-emphasised disgust, "that was all acting—with you, at least. The other was a woman—not an idiot or a baby."

"What! and you really liked Adelaide?"

"As if a poor foolish creature like you could have been compared to her!"

Phœbe gave a groan. This weapon had pierced her as effectively as he could have desired.

At the moment came a diversion of but too common a kind in these days—a man was "in the hall that wouldn't go away without seeing some one." These "men

in the hall" had become a periodical source of agony to the owner of the house, but were not the least trouble or anxiety to Phœbe, who used to say innocently:

"Why don't you tell them to go away and not come teasing here? They worry me so dreadfully."

And it was Phœbe again, who, after the usual painful scene of struggle to get the man to go away, would declare as innocently: "You see, I told you; if you only spoke firmly—"

Phœbe herself could never be got to face these awful beings, and, when her husband was absent, would send down messages by the maid, which were not of the slightest effect. Then, driven into a corner, she would throw down her arms, piteously confess that she had not the courage to face the enemy; and, when Mr. Pringle returned, beg of him to aid her.

The present caller was a butcher of extraordinary insolence, which was, as it

were, whetted on the steel that he carried at his belt when engaged in his professional duties. Mr. Pringle's heart sank and his face turned pale as he thought of what was before him. It suddenly passed through his mind that what was in Phœbe's hand at that moment would be a welcome mode of release. But in Phœbe's soul there was the same idea; and she was only looking at him with a hard pitilessness. Disdaining to make any appeal, he left the room, and went below desperately to face the butcher.

That personage was more truculent than usual. He was a broad fellow, with cheeks the colour of his own prime beef. He taunted his customer "with calling himself a gentleman." He roared and bellowed at him, and declared that he would "return that evening; and, if his money was not ready for him, would put a man in, and sell off every stick."

During the rest of that wretched day

Mr. Pringle was hurrying wildly about the streets, his only refuge; while Phœbe, turned perfectly reckless by his unlucky declaration, was meditating plans of vengeance. He little knew, under all that light thoughtlessness, what a warmth of attachment there was to him. But she had been stung, wounded to the soul.

"As he does not care for me," she thought, as she lay on her bed, beating her poor little cheeks against her pillow, "I will show him that I do not care for him."

After thinking it over again and again, she rose up.

"He would like my money, though he does not care for me. Well, he shall see." And she put on her things and went out, hurrying off to Regent Street.

As she was speeding on her way rather blindly and wildly, she heard her name called out: "Miss Dawson!" and, turning,

recognised Lady Cecilia Shortlands, whom she had met at Lord Garterley's. The lady had not heard of her marriage.

"The fact is," she said, "I did not know where you were, or I would have sent to you before; but I want you to do something for me. I have organised a fancy quadrille at Lady Llanthony's; mine is of the time of Charles the Second; and Miss Wynter has disappointed me. I want you to take her place." Phœbe was very pretty, she thought, and would just do.

Go to a ball; get a fancy dress! It was the last thing she could dream of; but suddenly she recollected she had the money in her pocket; she was still of importance, still sought for herself by other people. It would make him feel! The lady only thought how convenient was this nice substitute, and, giving her the address of Madame Sylvie, who had the pattern of the dress and the dress itself ready, went her way smiling.

In a fever of excitement Phœbe put herself into the hands of the artist, and recklessly ordered everything that would set her off. To the amazement of the personage, she even insisted on paying in advance for the dress, forcing the money into her hands. The amount demanded was even more than the little sum in her possession; but, of course, that made no difference. She returned home and surveyed her husband with a little malevolent devil peeping out of her eye.

His humour had changed in the interval. After a struggle, the necessity, the abject necessity and humiliation of the case had forced him into considering what would be for his advantage. After all, why should a little domestic squabble stand in the way? This money would deliver them from the insolent butcher. Only a few kind words to the sweet Phœbe—even a smile—a talisman she never could resist—and the

notes would be put into his hand with an eager delight.

As the hour for the return of the butcher drew near, he came to the resolution that he would "make it up," as it is called. But he little knew the "heart-scald," as it were, that his words had given. Anything but want of love—that could not be forgiven! The wild defiance in her eyes might have warned him.

He heard sounds of feet in the hall, and strange voices, as he went out of his room to go upstairs. Great cardboard boxes were being brought in, with a huge oil-skin-covered basket, on which two fussy Frenchwomen attended. Phœbe was at the top of the first landing.

"What is this?" Mr. Pringle said; "what do you mean by all this?"

"Dresses," said Phœbe, with a false vivacity. "Don't you see? I'm going to the fancy ball to-night."

"But I won't allow it," he said, with a

voice that was almost inarticulate from trembling. "Send them away."

"Hush!" said Phœbe; "come in here." And she closed the door. "That would be very foolish; for, you see, the goods are paid for."

"Paid for?" he gasped.

"Yes, with Tom's money. Yes," she added, with the same look in her eyes, "I can do what I like with my own money!"

At moments like this there is going on in the human soul a turmoil that suggests the conflicts of pandemonium. To think now of the little pastoral scene in Miss Cooke's garden — the pretty prattling Phœbe and her Apollo-like lover!—this, indeed, offered a terrible contrast.

CHAPTER III.

OPEN REBELLION.

He knew not what to say—what to do. The triumph, such as it was, was with Phœbe. The goaded Pringle was bereft of speech—nay, even of wit or intellect. At last he said :

"Leave the room—leave the room, this instant!" and he seized her arm roughly.

"I am going," said Phœbe frightened. "Don't push me in that way."

"This is certain—you shan't wear those things, if you have bought them. You don't leave this house to-night."

"Shan't I?" said she. "We shall see."

Madame Sylvie's agents were in the hall, and caught enough to understand what was going on. Indeed, one of the ladies had her ear to the door, when it was abruptly opened; but they were well accustomed to such unpleasant discussions between gentlemen and their wives on the subject of dressing.

When they were gone he repeated:

"Not one inch do you go out to-night!"

"All right," said she; "but you are too rough; look at the way you have marked my arm with your fingers."

Even a touch made an impression on Phœbe's delicate skin.

But when eight o'clock came, she was engaged in her room, with many candles blazing, getting ready for the event. When she was arrayed, she looked so piquant and brilliant that she really forgot her plans, and wished to go and show herself to him, and be told she was looking ravishing.

When she appeared descending the stairs, she had actually the notion of running up to him with a kiss, and asking—

"Are you not proud of me?"

But the greeting that met her was,

"You don't go out of this house to-night!" And it curdled all the affection into a bitter sort of whey, and called the little pet demon again into her eye.

"We shall see!" she said, girding herself up for the conflict. "Tell Jane to call me a cab."

"She shall go with you if she does, and never come back. I'll discharge you on the spot if you attempt to do it," added he, turning to the servant.

Jane was frightened, though wages were due to her, and did not move.

"I know what to do!" cried Phœbe, running to the door. "Sir," she cried, to a gentleman who was passing, "would you be kind enough to call me a cab?"

This person stared on seeing the gentleman and the other figures in the hall, then smiled. But on Phœbe's eager entreaty, he bowed, and did as she desired.

Mr. Pringle, sinking under this mortification, and seeing that she was uncontrollable, fled into his room. Thus the scene terminated.

Phœbe went to the ball, bearing under her finery a wretched heart, and being, indeed, morally speaking, a little delirious. She was chilled, too, by the strange faces and the stern, business-like manner in which she was ordered about by those who directed the quadrille. She was made to feel that she was only had in as a substitute; she knew not a soul there; and all the while, as her eyes turned back to the wretched household, she felt that a crisis had come, and that she was now in open rebellion.

Many persons noticed her and the curious wildness of her expression, the

eager way in which her glances darted, looking in all directions, and talking at random. Lady Cecilia had a peculiar "set," half-artistic, half-aristocratic men with bushy beards—attended by "queer" women, with pseudo-"golden" hair cropped over their foreheads, who sniffed rather disdainfully at the little fluttering creature that sat alone.

While she thus sat, she ceased to notice the glittering scene before her. The soreness at her heart increased; she was so helpless, that she could have almost cried aloud; and all then began to seem like a dream.

"You are not well," said a low, kindly voice beside her. "The heat is too much for you." It was a gentleman that spoke.

Phœbe smiled vacantly, and recovering herself, began to answer rather volubly and incoherently.

"If you went out of this room," he con-

tinued—" take my arm—you will be better then."

There was something of authority in the way he spoke, tempered with gravity. He was tall, good-looking, with a well-cut upper lip, and without beard or moustache. There was also a sound of pity and sympathy in his tones, and Phœbe, when she had recovered herself, felt a relief and a confidence that contrasted with her previous desolation.

So, without introduction, she rose, took his arm, and went down to the cooler regions of the hall.

" Now you are better," he said. " A little more and you would have fainted. I shall take you to your mamma's side presently, and then you will forgive my freedom."

The innate coquetry of Phœbe here brought a smile to her lips. It was delightful being thus mistaken for a little girl.

"I am a married lady," she said, with dancing eyes, though the soreness at her heart was intensified.

"Then we will look for your husband."

Here the old sad expression came back, and with some fright she said:

"He is not here to-night. But, indeed, I think I had better go home at once."

This seemed to reveal the whole incident to the gentleman, who looked at her with a sort of slow surprise.

"Very well," he said gravely; "it would be the best course, I think."

Phœbe was now as eager to be gone as she had been to arrive.

"It seems like Cinderella," he said, "at her ball. Are you in a great hurry?"

In a few moments he had brought out Phœbe and placed her in a cab. There was a kindly, good-natured manner about him, and a tone of interest in his voice, that touched her. It was as though he was speaking to a child.

"What is your name, please?" said she, with some hesitation.

"Brookfield," he answered. "George Brookfield. Good-night."

The cabman came down from his box to shut the door, and Mr. Brookfield drew back so as not to hear what direction was given. Phœbe was piqued at this indifference, and she saw him turn and go back to the ball.

"There," she thought, "there is a manly person that one can respect." Yet there had been a day when the other seemed to her just the same.

Her house was separated only by a few streets from the scene of the ball; and when they drew up at the door, the bell was rung in due course.

No answer came.

It was rung again, after an interval, with the same result. Then it was rung more violently; the two bells were rung together; but no reply could be obtained.

"They can't or won't hear," said the driver.

Phœbe was beginning to understand.

But it could not be; he dared not do such a thing, she had told her maid to sit up. Instantly growing defiant, Phœbe thought within herself:

"I shall sit here the whole night, and let them find me here in the morning; and on him be the disgrace!"

More ringing of the most violent kind but with no result, and the cabman again repeated:

"They won't hear—that's what it is. Better knock 'em up at a hotel."

"Try once more!" cried Phœbe, now in a terrible fright. "Oh do, I implore you, make them hear!"

"Why," said a voice in wonder—a gentleman had stopped and looked in—"this cannot be—— You can't get them to hear? We will make one last attempt."

And he and the cabman then maintained a kind of sostenuto ringing for some minutes, and waited the result.

Mr. Brookfield shook his head.

"That would wake the dead," he said. "It is incomprehensible. It is no use trying to get admission here. I would suggest your going at once to the house of some friend with better ears," he added sarcastically. "You see there is a crowd gathering, and the police, who will make a fuss. We are disturbing the street."

"Oh, what shall I do?" cried she in an agony; "locked out of my own house in this way, and I have done nothing—indeed I have not."

"Hush! hush!" he said gravely. "Whom do you know in London? What relations have you?"

"Oh, yes!" said she eagerly, as though he had suggested the name, "there is my mother."

"Ah! she is sure to hear," he said, in

the same grave way; "I would recommend your going at once. And, if you will allow me, I think it would be better that I should accompany you."

He got into the cab and they drove away, leaving quite a little knot of idlers staring after them and up at the house. Phœbe was beside herself with agitation, and talked almost incoherently, half aloud and half to herself.

"Oh, it's terrible, is it not, to be shut out of my house—and I have done nothing—only because I went to this ball, like other people. It must end. It shall end. If Tom were here he daren't do it. Oh the disgrace!" continued she, in a sort of agony, "the disgrace!"

"You mustn't think too seriously of it. It were best to say nothing to any one. It is a sad necessity, but these things must be accepted and suffered. People only feel curiosity and not sympathy."

He spoke himself without the least

curiosity, and with so much sympathy that Phœbe was not a little affected.

Here they were now at Mrs. Dawson's humble abode, where, late as it was, a light was burning, the lady being wakeful, and often reading in bed.

"Oh, there's mamma," Phœbe said, with much relief. She had feared another pitiable wait before the door might be in store for her here. The light was agitated, and the blind drawn aside.

"Now," said Mr. Brookfield, "you are safe, and I may say good-night."

CHAPTER IV.

AT LAST A BREAKDOWN.

"My daughter cannot return to you, or see you again, until you have made the most ample atonement for the disgraceful conduct of the other night, and until an engagement be given that she will be treated with more kindness than she has hitherto received.

"Only for a gentleman who came to her assistance, she might have spent the night in the streets."

Such was the letter that Mr. Pringle received after this unpleasant occurrence. He was already feeling uncomfortable at

what he had done, and nervously apprehensive of the consequences; but he was defiant.

"If they wait for that," he thought, "they will wait long." And he determined that "no power on earth" should get him to take any such step.

But what if Tom should be sent for? He winced at the very idea.

And now, by a rueful coincidence, came a rush of troubles, pouring in and overwhelming him. The truculent butcher, who had returned, as he had threatened, and found nothing satisfactory, was not slow to exact heavy punishment; before many days had gone, all the furniture of the little house was seized under a bill of sale, and the curtain fell on the little short-lived piece of housekeeping.

Our Phœbe had been very unhappy during these days. Notwithstanding her "cruel injuries," she did not feel them as her mother wished, though she was of

course willing to display a certain amount of spirit. She felt lonely and solitary; though when she contrasted her husband's coldness and harshness with the chivalrous behaviour of the stranger, she felt a pang of doubt.

"If I had such a friend as that—some one to advise me!" she thought, on the second day after these events.

She had told his share in her rescue to her mother, who knew all about him, as she did about every one.

"Brookfield—a good old family. But there's something about him that I heard—about a disappointment in love, or his wife running away with some one; but he's a most important personage."

Almost as she spoke the maid entered with the card of the gentleman in question.

"You'd better see him yourself," said Mrs. Dawson.

"Oh yes! I must thank him!" cried Phœbe, excited as usual. "He was so

kind; and I want to explain—What am I to say?"

Accordingly Mr. Brookfield was shown up. It was an awkward meeting, for he was in possession of an awkward secret; but he soon reassured Phœbe.

"I only came," he said, "just to tell you this. I am afraid you may think that I am one of those gossips that tell everything. It would be affectation—indeed, I could not expect you to believe me—if I said that I did not understand the meaning of what took place last night; but, as far as I am concerned, no one shall ever learn a word of it. I wish you to be quite easy on that point."

"It is most kind of you; and I don't know what I should have done but for you. Oh, it was too terrible," she added, covering her face with her hands.

"I hardly know what to say," he said. "If I sympathise with you—"

"Yes, I can understand," said she; "you

will appear to condemn my husband. But I cannot tell you how much I am obliged to you. It is long since I met such real kindness," she added warmly, unconscious that she was actually condemning her husband.

He had turned his thoughtful face to her, and the coquette Phœbe, with all her troubles, was afterwards pleased to speculate that she had made a deep impression on him.

"I do think," she said, in her light way, to her mother, "that he is quite in love with me!"

"I have no right or title," he went on, "to say what I am going to say; but just as you accepted my humble service—such as it was—so you might be inclined to let me offer my aid in other ways when you should have occasion for it. It will please me, I assure you, to give it; and you will be doing me a favour to accept it. I am now going down to some friends in the

country. I must tell you that you have really inspired me with an interest; so that if you have no objection to my working in your service, I shall be glad to do so."

"Oh, what kindness!" said the pleased Phœbe. "How good of you!"

There was a certain charm about this grave visitor, and the kindly interest there was in his manner. Phœbe felt, she knew not why, that this was the first friend she had met with for years.

Of course this was fanciful, but such impressions do come, and are difficult to account for.

Mrs. Dawson, having allowed a due interval to pass to admit of the interchange of grateful feelings, felt it was now time to intervene, and secure so useful an acquaintance on a business foundation. So she entered, with bonnet on, as though she had just returned from walking; and, with a "Phœbe, dear, Mrs. Philabeg is waiting to see you," dismissed her daughter.

She soon "took his measure," as she termed it.

"My dear," she said later to her daughter, "did you ever see such a handsome creature? And such a finely-cut lip! Such a sweet voice too! I am quite charmed with him. And I've found out all about him. He is well off and monstrously clever, and he *was* in love with a most beautiful girl, who jilted him on the evening before the marriage. And he's going down to some people in the country, who, I am sure, would be glad to get him. He admires you, I can see. I know it's not right to put such things in a young married woman's head, but upon my word I believe he's taken a fancy to you. There's no harm in it, I am sure."

Poor Phœbe forgot all her troubles in this flattering compliment. Admiration, "were it only that of à coal-heaver," to use her mother's phrase, was ever welcome.

It must be said, however, that originally

this was connected with what she most of all desired, the admiration of her husband; and she felt that such appreciation might increase her value in his eyes. But the insult that she had received had been too much. She was grown hard and defiant, and would never pass it over. Her mother did not quite take the same view.

"We must put up with these things, my dear. I remember your poor father used to turn me out of the room like a child when I displeased him, and I used to threaten, and scream; but certainly I did provoke him a great deal."

"It shall never be done again to me," said Phœbe, with compressed lips, "never. And he shall beg my pardon on his knees for this."

That very evening the door opened, and Mr. Pringle entered the room. Phœbe rose up in her stateliest way to leave it.

"You needn't go," he said.

"What! after turning me out of my

own house, you come into my presence?"

"You have no house now," he said, covering his face. "It has come at last. They have seized everything; and I myself have been turned out. I am a wretched outcast, without anything left to me."

His face was full of a helpless despair. In an instant she had flown to him, and was fondling and patting him, as if she had some cherished little dog in her arms. All was forgotten, and, indeed, she added the curious speech:

"I am so glad! Now that you are really poor, you will be mine altogether. Won't you? And we can take a little lodging now! and I will show you that I can work for you."

He had not the spirit to be impatient, or this speech would have made him so.

Mrs. Dawson, when she heard of this state of things, threw her eyes upwards, and said:

"You have made a pretty kettle of fish of it between you. Remember, I told you you would be glad to come to the old woman one day. Well, you can have a bed, and your bit and sup with me."

Thus had the episode that began so romantically at the garden-gate of the Misses Cooke's academy, worked itself out to this disastrous issue.

And here we shall leave this luckless pair to learn such lessons as disaster can impart, while a period of six months—as the playbills have it—is supposed to elapse before the next act begins.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAMILY AGAIN.

ONCE more we turn to Joliffe's Court, after the family have laboured yet another season on the London fashionable road, breaking stones, desperately trying to "get on," and know nice people.

It was heartbreaking work, almost as hard as ever, although the family had indeed made way, owing, it must be said, to the valuable tact and assistance of their guest, Miss Lacroix. Her advice had rarely ever failed to produce results, and she contrived to give this help without wounding their pride. Neither did she in-

terfere with the young ladies, though there were several occasions when gentlemen sought to offer her attentions, which she diverted to their proper objects in a suitable and effective manner. There could be no doubt that it was she who "laid on" the little pack in the track of the young Lord Greenhithe, the Earl of Sheerness's eldest son, and his cousin the Hon. Edward Slingsby, and conducted the operations—which, in every instance hitherto, had been contrived in a feeble and purposeless fashion—in a masterly and effective manner. The Pringles wondered, and admired, and admitted her superior genius.

And it was she who had put into old Sam's head that daring scheme which was now absorbing all the faculties of the family—nothing short of his coming forward to stand for the county, in the place of Sir Gilbert Homerton, who was failing, and, indeed, not expected to live very long.

"Mind," she said in her quiet way, "I don't want to flatter you, or to say that you will succeed, for that I know nothing about; but, with your fortune and position, you are certainly entitled to look for it."

And she it was who certainly first offered, to the aspiring eyes of Mrs. Pringle and the girls, the glittering bait of the baronetcy which the family felt that their position also entitled them to look for. What was wealth without honours? A feverish longing took possession of them to get on this yet higher step of the ladder.

People were often curious about this Miss Lacroix—who was she? where did she come from? How was it "that the Pringles had taken her up?" But there was always the satisfactory answer forthcoming: "A daughter of a clergyman," who had been left totally unprovided for.

"Then a couple of old spinsters, that

kept a school"—here old Sam would take up the narrative—"tried to make a drudge of her; but she was too high-spirited to stand that, and she gave them the slip, sir. And a very worthy woman took a fancy to her, and adopted her, and left her a hundred and fifty pounds a year in her will. So she is quite independent, you see. Fit to be the wife of a cab. minister; and, indeed, more fit to be a cab. minister than some of the fellows now driving the vehicle." Then Sam would declare that she deserved a rich, well-to-do husband, whose fortune she would make.

"And I mean that she shall have one, if she'll only wait long enough;" and Sam, by his winking, conveyed that he knew of such a partner, and of one who was actually waiting at that present time of speaking.

"And now," added Sam, "she's got a perfect treasury here," pointing to his head, "that will astonish the world yet. She's writing a novel that will set Paternoster

Row on fire, sir. Such observation of life and manners; such character; all our friends brought in; done with a master or mistress touch!"

It was fortunate that the lady thus panegyrised did not hear these rather compromising, though well-meant encomiums.

Not the least benefit which she had conferred on the family, and which really endeared her to them, was her interposing between them and that serious incubus—as she had now grown to be—Lady Juliana. Rebuffed, neglected, snubbed, this thick-skinned personage remained immovable, finding a justification for the assaults made upon her in smarting speeches, cuts, and sundry talkings at "the family" in presence of visitors; exercising, in short, a sort of terrorism which was her security. This nearly poisoned all their happiness. She had come on a visit to the family, which it was understood was to last for a month or

six weeks; but when that period had elapsed the lady showed no signs of movement, and alluded carelessly to future events a month off, in which she spoke of participating—some ball or festival.

Consternation settled on the family at this news; and Sam, coming in later, full of spirits, noted the blank faces, and was told the reason.

"Oh, this is not to be stood," he said; "I'll have the old woman on me all my life. I'll just tell her plainly at dinner that she must walk. What do you say, my sweetheart?" he added, turning to Miss Lacroix.

"Mr. Pringle, I told you before not to address Miss Lacroix in that style. She doesn't wish it, I am sure?"

"It is most disagreeable to me," said the lady; "and I would request Mr. Pringle, as a favour, to discontinue it."

"Before company? Yes, by all means, honeybird; but, when we are alone in this

way—— Why, you don't mind my old woman here, or the ponies?"

"As you ask my advice," said Miss Lacroix, "I would not say anything to Lady Juliana of that kind. I fear she will only found on it a claim for satisfaction; she will consider herself aggrieved; and you will have to try and conciliate her, and get her to forgive you."

"Why, what a queer little head you have," said old Sam, much puzzled. "How could that be? No, no. Leave it to me; I'll give her the route to-night."

That day, at dinner, Mr. Pringle said, in his bluntest, roughest way: "Well, my Lady Juliana, I'm afraid we'll have to deny ourselves the pleasure of your society soon."

"I understand you," said she sharply. "One of your usual complimentary speeches. Pleasure of my society, indeed! But I don't mind you."

"Oh, but that won't do, you know! We

are going to fill our house here, and Mrs. P. has asked a lot; and the fact is—"

"You wish to turn me out? What a coarse way you have of speaking, and to a lady who is your guest!"

"Guest, indeed!" sneered Sam.

"Yes, you don't treat me as one exactly. But I decline to accept such a notice to quit as that. You shan't eject me——"

"My dear Lady Juliana," faltered Mrs. Pringle, "we don't mean such a thing; Mr. Pringle puts it so oddly."

"Yes, he does indeed. But I am not accustomed to it. I have lived in a different class, who do not speak to me in that style. To be insulted, and before your servants! Let me go to my room, please."

And to her room the injured lady repaired, declining to see any one till the next day; when she descended in all her awful terrors to the library, and

required all the family to assemble and hear her. It was the first time she had ever been insulted by a gentleman, she declared, so she hardly knew how to behave.

Much abashed, Sam interposed. "Oh, I never meant——"

"I now wish you to understand what our true relations are," said the lady, in a very decided tone. "You talk of having people to come to you. You forget to whom you owe the acquaintance of those people."

Sam was going to say, "Oh! kicking away the ladder—I know," but wisely forbore.

"I look on it, and I must say it plainly, that you are under very weighty obligation to me. Every one knows it well. I brought you into society, got you friends; you can't deny it—or do you?"

"No, no," said Mrs. Pringle humbly, "we are much obliged to you."

"You show it," said she angrily. "Now I mean to take my departure. I cannot expect manners on Mr. Pringle's side, but every lady, whatever she does, counts on a certain respect. But recollect now, please, that this treatment has cancelled everything. I shall make no secret, either, of the way I have been treated. I owe it to myself to give my own account of the way I have been treated by persons for whom I vouched and pledged my credit."

This alarming threat made the family most uncomfortable. Lady Juliana's tongue, it was well known, was viperish; and the family felt that their guest was but too well acquainted with their weak places; and the picture of the quondam friend and endorser rushing about and blackening them before the face of "society," presented itself with extraordinary vividness. It would be fatal.

Accordingly Mrs. Pringle pleaded earnestly and eagerly for Sam; but the

lady was sternly inflexible. Then she enjoyed the satisfaction of being ruefully "pressed" to stay, for that delightfully indefinite period "as long as she liked," which she graciously consented to do, on abundant apologies and promises being given of better behaviour in future.

Thus was her position actually fortified by what it was intended should destroy it. Above all, she insisted that Mr. Pringle should make the handsomest apologies for his most ungentlemanly treatment. This was done ruefully and reluctantly by Sam, who was overborne by the remonstrances and entreaties of his family, who had thus to accept this "Old Woman of the Sea" for a long period to come.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AWKWARD ACCIDENT.

THE "Joliffe Meeting" had been lately revived by a few of the gentry of sporting tastes, and the Pringles had put down their names for a magnificent subscription. They almost seemed inclined to offer payment for everything—for friends, acquaintances, balls, dinners, and politeness; and they had now filled their house with guests of every degree, who, in a wavering manner, had consented to come and stay with them, and whom the family would have been delighted to subsidise and secure, were such an innovation at all likely to be tolerated.

The house itself was resplendent—the new conservatories finished, the new rooms "thrown open," the new furniture set out, and the new servants all duly marshalled.

And here was the first evening of the festival, when nearly all the company had arrived, and were seated at dinner in the great banqueting-room. This chamber was done up in the mediæval style, with rich "coronas" and coved ceiling, and a huge baronial fireplace, the chimney-piece whereof was at least a foot over the head of a man of moderate stature. The family pictures, full and half length, were all hung round; though the family had always to answer requests for information in a sort of deprecating way, and explain that they were not exactly ancestors. In fact, the catalogue had long since been lost, and it was difficult to find a name for each picture.

That was, indeed, a proud moment for Mrs. Pringle, as she sat in the middle of the table, and looked down from end to

end. Her thoughts travelled back to the days of struggle when they were in the miserable little rural tenement, and Sam was agent; when they were both straining to make ends meet, and had faint hopes of securing the new young doctor for one of the ponies. Now she was queen of this glittering scene. There were lords and ladies seated on each side, whose attendance had been secured, she had to admit, by labours and anxieties well-nigh as painful as those of the old days of poverty. There was Lord Garterley's voice rising noisily above all the rest. Could she not remember the joyful evening, now so long ago, when Sam came in with the blissful tidings that they had been asked to stay at Garterley?

And there, seated next the elder of the ponies, was there not the young patrician, the racing Lord Rotherhithe—a spirited young fellow, who was there ostensibly for the Joliffe races; but was also to make use

of his visit to improve his acquaintance with the charming lady that sat beside him.

Through certain mysterious agencies, courtship was on this occasion, at least, to lose its sweet romance; and by some kind of freemasonry it was perfectly understood, on both sides, that, if seventy thousand pounds were forthcoming, the young lord "was theirs."

Old Sam bellowed noisily at such a proposal. "He was not going to cripple himself for life," or saddle the estate with such an enormous burden; but he was, of course, overborne by the chatter of tongues. The delight of alluding to "My daughter, Lady Rotherhithe," and of having coronets on bags, note-paper, carriage-panels, etc., was too much; and it was determined that prodigious efforts should be made at once to raise the money, and "saddle the estate" with it, even though that willing beast gave way under the load and came down upon

its knees. The worst was, this process of "saddling" had already begun to a large extent; and as a facetious friend remarked, who was recommending economy to the family, ought to be "bridled." For the cynic there must have been something truly comic in the spectacle of the pair, "posing" as lovers, and laboriously striving to get up some of that amatory enthusiasm which their business-like relations appeared to chill. However, it was admitted by the agents on both sides that the young people must have time to get acquainted with one another.

What a babel of tongues! for here were plenty of young men, a few of whom had been "sent down," just as Mr. Gunter had sent down some of his cooks and waiters, and who wished to be at the races. They were told that they would be, in the favourite phrase, "put up" at an uncommonly jolly house, where they would find plenty of pretty girls; and, accordingly,

had set off with a light heart, as they would to an hotel. They were also told they would find the "drollest old cove" of a host they ever set eyes on; but they needn't mind him. There were incomprehensible dowagers, lively married pairs—to say nothing of an irrepressible spinster, known as Miss Newton, and Miss Wraxall the heiress.

As a matter of course, those masters of the ceremonies, the Charles Webbers, were there, who, it was plain to the observant, had marked the Pringles for reversioners to Lord Garterley, and who had already assumed a kind of "resident" or old-inhabitant manner, as though knowing everything about the place.

To this extraordinary influence Mrs. Pringle and the ponies were already succumbing, and seemed to lean for support on those useful personages.

There also were some young belles of distinction, who had fought, with honour,

several campaigns during the season—whom it was a distinction, as in the case of other valiant combatants, to entertain and drink with. And there, too, was Lady Juliana, undislodged and undislodgable, who, after a short absence, when she preyed on other friends, had returned to head-quarters. In short, Mrs. Pringle and the ponies had managed it wonderfully, and collected a most imposing and effective company; though, unlike managers of theatres, they had but the slightest acquaintance with most of the performers; and some of the leading stars they scarcely knew at all.

It was, indeed, a proud moment—everything going well, even to the lovers sitting down at the end of the table, and likely soon to assume the aspect of a regularly happy pair. Sam must cripple himself and saddle the estate to secure that happy result; of that there must be no doubt.

They had just reached the second or third station on the journey—that of the *entrées*—when there was noticed a rather long delay; in fact, the banquet seemed to be suspended.

Lord Garterley was relating a droll anecdote—furnishing the most hearty laughs himself—when he suddenly stopped, and sniffing noisily, said—

"Something on fire, I think!"

Every one began to sniff also; and, indeed, there was a strong, acrid smell of soot through the room. Mrs. Pringle turned pale. She had a presentiment that something awful was coming.

"Oh, dear!" said several persons, as the disagreeable odour became more and more pungent. "There is no mistake about it."

The kitchen chimney, and the new French cook! Mrs. Pringle was thinking, with a sinking heart. Oh, the wreck of the beautiful dinner! the disgrace! the

discontent! the ridicule of the situation! Was there ever anything so unfortunate?

The servants had by this time deserted their duties; and Mr. Batts, in a state of portly agitation, had taken no notice of the plaintive inquiry of the lady of the house for information, but had hurried off to the scene of the disaster.

Suddenly, several young ladies near the window rose with a half scream:

"Oh, look! The house must be on fire!"

A thick, yellow cloud, speckled with "blacks," was drifting by the window. This was the signal for a tumultuous rising and confusion, pulling back of chairs, with cries of, "The house is on fire!"

Unlucky Pringles!

The young lord was the most eager wag, and said with unfeeling thoughtlessness—

"Oh, how jolly this will be! I have never seen a fire in the country."

Suddenly, a gentleman—in a light overcoat, as if just arrived—entered.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "There is no danger. It is merely the kitchen chimney, and the fire is all but out. As I was driving up the avenue, I noticed the flames bursting out; and, as no one seemed to have noticed it, I ran to give the alarm! It will be over in a few minutes."

"So; you see——" said Mrs. Pringle, in much agitation. "Pray, sit down again. It is all over."

With some doubtfulness the company did as it was desired.

"I know this means no dinner," said Lord Garterley, in much ill-humour. "The taste of soot will be on everything."

From the beginning Mrs. Pringle had felt this presentiment. Her lovely dinner of inauguration all wrecked! Was there ever anything so unfortunate, so maliciously "contrary?"

But now appeared Mr. Batts, very red

and plethoric, with word that "it was all over." And a few minutes later the gentleman who had reassured the company made his appearance, and officially announced that there was no damage done —that all traces of fire had been put out.

"I am sorry to say," added he, laughing, "including the kitchen fire. The cook is perfectly light-headed."

The more elderly members of the party looked glum; and one, more "grumpy" than the rest, remarked, *sotto voce*—

"Something always goes wrong at these fussy houses. In overdoing things they do nothing."

Mr. Brookfield, for such was the name of the new arrival, had found his way to one of the vacant places, and took the chair that was next to Miss Lacroix. This young lady partook of the general brilliancy that distinguished the Pringle homestead, and had acquired a sort of style in manner and dress—the only thing that had been

wanting to set her off. Her head, with its rather thin but perfectly-smoothed hair, and the clear-cut face, with her thoughtful, ever-ranging eyes, made her a remarkable and attractive figure. As she sat behind Mr. Brookfield, it was noticed that they were the two cleverest-looking heads in the room.

Hers, however, was the graver expression; while his was full of animated, quickly-shifting glances; and, as we have said, every part—forehead, chin, throat—was admirably cut, if not actually to use the favourite word, "chiselled." His manner and gestures were quick and mercurial, and when he fixed his eyes on you, there was a certain sweetness and gentleness that was irresistible. It was this that attracted our heroine—and she found herself gazing at the newly-arrived face with a singular curiosity, if not interest.

"What is to be done?" he said, turning to her. "It is getting serious. The poor cooks are really all demoralised."

"Yes," said she, still gazing at him. "It is very mortifying for Mrs. Pringle. If I only knew what to do."

"You are friend and counsellor of the family—that I can see at once."

She turned on him sharply.

"What, you think you detected something of the dependent air?"

"Friendship and counsel are not accepted from dependents," he said coldly. "I do not say or think anything of the kind; but, if I were of a suspicious turn, I ought to be inclined to suppose——"

He paused.

"What, pray?"

"Well, that 'self-excuse means self-accuse.' But I am not so inclined. What would you think of this—our hostess looks wretched, and miserable, and helpless—what would you think of a visit to the kitchen to restore order and confidence, and get some salvage out of the wreck? Seriously, to select something that will

occupy their thoughts and teeth while the rest is getting ready. Like the Russian throwing the children from the sledge to the wolves."

In a moment Miss Lacroix had left the room, and found, as had been anticipated, the whole kitchen in disorder—the cook prostrated, almost imbecile, and receiving attention from his agitated kitchen-maids. She spoke to him soothingly in his own tongue, and, with all kindness, encouraged him to make an attempt.

The fire was lit. Some of the temporary dishes Mr. Brookfield had speculated on were discovered and got ready; and "a noble round of beef" was carried triumphantly in to be cast to the wolves. It was greeted with acclamation. Somehow corned beef of noble dimensions always enjoys popularity; and men like Lord Garterley have a relish for this presumably "vulgar" joint, which suggests the imperial visits to Theresa and the singing

cafés by the noble ladies of the Empire.

In a very short time the regular train of dishes set in. Good humour was restored; and the hum of voices rose again.

"We owe it all to this young lady; to Miss——?" and Mr. Brookfield paused.

"Lacroix," she said hesitatingly, and with something like a blush.

"I see," he said, "one of the old Huguenot families."

"No," she answered abruptly, "our family is English."

"Impossible," he said, "with that name. You will be surprised at my being thus positive; but I have made a study of the matter."

He was struck by the cool measured way in which she replied:

"Just as you have made a study of repairing the losses occasioned by chimneys getting on fire, or extemporising dinners. You have really a valuable stock of knowledge."

There was a look of warning in her eye as who should say, "Don't meddle with me."

He seemed surprised, and then said quietly:

"Well, I shall add that to my stock of knowledge."

"What?" she asked.

"The origin of your name."

After dinner, when the luxurious disorder of the drawing-room had set in, it was easy to see that Mr. Brookfield was the centre figure. The older gentlemen, such as Lord Garterley, directed their talk to him, and gathered round to listen to some curious stories, relating to persons whom they knew well, which he had brought from town. He was in figure a personage likely to be the centre of any gathering in which he found himself. And indeed, it seemed to the ladies that his bright, animated head and face seemed to contrast strangely with the group of in-

flamed, rather animal "dining-out" faces with which he was surrounded.

The scene was a brilliant one—lords and ladies gathered thus profusely in the gorgeous rooms of the Pringles. It gladdened the heart of the lady of the house.

And even now a letter was handed in which brought a smile of delight to her face.

"Only think!" she cried as she read, "dear Dr. Drinkwater is coming to-morrow. He has offered himself in the kindest way."

"As for that," said Lord Garterley, "he has offered himself in the kindest way for everything that has been going, for the last fifty years."

"You know he has been made Bishop of St. Dunstan's."

"You don't mean to say he's coming here!" said Lord Garterley in vexation. "You want to drive us all away, I see."

Horror-stricken at this view, Mrs. Prin-

gle was reduced to her favourite smile of bewilderment; for she could not understand how a person enjoying the title and consideration of a bishop should not be received with delight and welcome. But this mystery was a part of that other great mystery which she could not solve, viz.—why the setting out of splendid entertainments should not be alone sufficient to secure the attendance of society.

Now the after-dinner diversions set in. The ponies had enjoyed lessons from one Francesco Smith, the fashionable singing-master, who had given his concert, which he meant to be an annual one, in a duchess's drawing-room, and who pitilessly forced his guinea tickets—as a conjurer forces his cards—on his rather reluctant pupils. The fair candidate for the young lord had a voice, some of whose notes competed in shrillness with the troublesome peacock which strutted on the lawn; but she did not lack industry, and that amazing

coolness, amounting to heroism, which stifles shyness, and, in the same holy cause of "getting on," would have made her join a storming party. The young Lord Rotherhithe, who knew nothing of music, stood by and turned over the leaves in an official manner, as though it were his duty.

Then she was relieved by other candidates. The evening rather "dragged on." A good-looking young man sang a comic song in a very unaffected, pleasant way, and at once attracted Lord Garterley's earnest attention. He was delighted with him, and "must have him down at Garterley." "A most agreeable, talented young fellow," he said again and again. This was about the fiftieth of these paragons that had enjoyed his lordship's patronage, and whose prospects had been more or less seriously damaged by this kindly notice.

On the next day, after lunch, when the driving and riding and other amusements were being arranged, the sound of carriage-

wheels was heard; and Mr. Brookfield, passing through the great hall, saw a tall, portly gentleman, with a florid face, in a shovel hat and a comforter, who was very particular about his luggage, and tyrannical in settling with the driver of the fly that brought him. Mr. Brookfield recognised him.

"We owe you a public thanks for keeping those men in order," he said. "I only wish they were all curates in your diocese."

The new bishop grunted. He knew "this Brookfield," having often pronounced judgment on him as a carping fellow, and suspected a covert sneer in everything that he said.

But at this moment a lady crossed the hall, and stood hesitating; while the bishop, having got clear of his comforter, assumed that it was one of the family, and advanced with a courtly episcopal greeting.

Suddenly she started, and the bishop

drew back. Mr. Brookfield looked on in surprise.

"Dr. Drinkwater!" she said.

"What, you here!" said the bishop angrily. "How comes this? What does it mean?"

"Why, it means that Miss Lacroix is staying on a visit with our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Pringle."

"Miss La what?" cried the divine, with something like disgust. "Cross, I think, ma'am, is your name?"

With a slight flush of colour, the lady said calmly:

"It is the same name——"

"Not exactly; but it has a more romantic sound," said Mr. Brookfield. "It is like what they do on the stage."

The bishop was regarding her darkly, as the insults that he had received from her on that memorable occasion at the Misses Cooke's academy began to come back on him. He was not very certain about the

matter; but he recalled distinctly that he had never been so affronted and mortified before a large assembly in his whole life. The story had gone about: the great, pompous dean had been "put down" by a school-girl at the Misses Cooke's academy; and here she was now grown-up, meeting him at a private house—an instance of exceedingly bad taste on the part of the Pringles. A glow came to his cheeks as he thought of all this, and, without a word, he stalked off down the corridor towards the drawing-room.

Before he had gone very far, a light step was heard behind him, and a hand as light touched him. Again the bishop turned, with a benevolent smile suddenly fitted on to his lips, for he thought that it was the hostess. The smile was as hastily removed when he saw that it was Miss Lacroix.

"You must forget all that, my lord," she said hurriedly. "I was a school-girl then.

Not that I am sorry, for I was treated very unkindly."

"I think it very bad taste of you being here, ma'am; I prefer not entering on the subject," he said angrily.

"Exactly," she said; "that will be the best course. We will not enter on it at all. You are too great a personage now, my lord, to be affected by what a poor school-girl did. I am far too humble a creature to make it worth while your recollecting. Better let it be forgotten. Even to the old name that I used to bear."

So saying, she left the amazed bishop. There was a tone of decision, and even of menace, in what she said that was unpleasant. But it had its effect. He remained looking after her for a long time.

CHAPTER VII.

A SKIRMISH.

LATER on in the day Miss Lacroix met Mr. Brookfield.

"I did not like to draw near, though I wished to get to the drawing-room, until you had 'squared,' as they say, the bishop."

Miss Lacroix looked at him steadily.

"You have taken some dislike to me," she said suddenly. "Because, since you arrived last night, you seem to have singled me out as the object of a number of unkind speeches and doings."

He was a little astonished.

"Well, you know," he said, "it seems a little odd and unaccountable—that changed name, and your curious reception by the bishop."

"I see, you wish to make out that I am some description of adventuress. Well, perhaps I am. That is, I have the misfortune to be alone in the world, and to be obliged to fight my own battles, and make my own way. But do leave me alone. We shall be in the house together for some days, and I should like to have a chance of gaining your good opinion."

"Now you are making far too much of my careless speeches. I don't mean them so unkindly as you think."

"Come," she said, with that suddenness which was characteristic of her. "I would wish to stand well with you. Ask me any questions you like, cross-examine me on my life, and I will tell you everything, and conceal nothing. There! You will think the better of me for it, I am

certain. I promise you I will not fence, nor evade, but be as candid and straightforward as you please."

"And you would really wish to stand well in my eyes? May I ask why?"

"There was something in you when you came in last evening—in the way you spoke, in the way you acted. Again, you seemed to me to be the master of the whole company—the superior person."

"For Heaven's sake," he said, laughing, "don't call me that! and," he added gravely, "pray, no compliments."

"I mean you seemed to be able to dispose of everybody as you pleased. Perhaps I am afraid of you; but I have not had time to analyse what I feel."

All this must have seemed handsome enough to the gentleman to whom it was addressed. It was perfectly genuine, and was spoken with a calm, business-like tone of explanation. He might have thought, at first, that this was the device of an

artful person to gain time; but something whispered to him that it was nature, and natural.

The new bishop was a great talker, even in his diaconal days; but, fortified now by his high position, he seemed to think his dining-room chair was a sort of pulpit or rostrum, whence he was privileged to discourse to the polite congregation.

Almost at once, as he took his seat, his eye settled with much displeasure on Miss Lacroix, who caused his cheeks to glow and his lips to be pursed up. But he had evidently taken her hint, and was cautious. He engrossed all the talk, and yet, as was remarked, for every word he gave out, took in a morsel or a gulp.

"What's this I hear about your daughter, ma'am?" he asked.

And the pleased Mrs. Pringle told him all the details about the happy fortune of her "eldest." "She is very accomplished;

we had Francesco Smith all last season, you know."

"What for?" said the bishop; "who is Smith?"

"Oh! don't you know? Taught Lady Munchausen's daughters. He gives the best music lessons. I never would send them to a boarding-school — on principle."

There were other reasons beside that well-worn stalking-hack "on principle." But she was astonished by the rude vehemence with which he replied:

"You were right, ma'am. They are bad places; they bring up the girls to all kinds of iniquity; making assignations with lovers and the like——"

"Hallo! my lord!" cried Lord Garterley, "what's all this? How can you know that?"

On this, "without mentioning names, of course," his lordship was proceeding to describe the adventure at the Misses Cooke's

school, and had got as far as a sketch of Phœbe, when, to his amazement, he received a jog on his arm, and Lord Garterley suddenly turned the conversation with a question:

"Now what sort of a prelate was the late bishop, your predecessor?"

"Oh, pretty well; fair enough. But I was telling you—this little girl, who was innocent enough in her looks, contrived to take in the young fellow after all, who, I suppose, has rued the day he ever came hanging about a ladies' academy. Why—what's the matter now?"

In a sort of hoarse nautical whisper, behind his hand, the peer proceeded to say:

"It's their son. Don't you see? Don't say any more." At which the new bishop's goggle eyes ranged backwards and forwards in wild bewilderment.

Mr. Brookfield, who had been listening, saw the awkwardness of the situation; and,

though not understanding, adroitly turned the conversation from the main line into a sort of siding.

"Your description," he said, "suggests a little adventure that I met with some time ago. It might have been the beginning of a little bit of romance, had I been able to follow it up."

Every one became interested; the bishop particularly so, in a dish which was at his elbow, gently trying to draw his attention, much as an amiable dog tries to attract your notice at breakfast.

"It was at a ball"—Mr. Brookfield could tell a story dramatically—"and I was there, attracted by a bright creature with an excited but rather wobegone look. She was the most piquant, natural little thing in the world; and there was a sort of childish petulance about her that was most interesting. You may judge, when I found myself speaking to her, unintroduced. But I was really drawn to her

by the sort of wild frightened look in her pretty eyes—"

"Hallo, Brookfield!" cried Lord Garterley; "now listen to him every one! How he warms up, you see."

"She so attracted me," went on that gentleman, "that I began to talk of bringing her to her mother, or her sister. It turned out, she was by herself at the ball; had no friends; was wretched; and further, that she was a married dame!"

"I declare I am getting curious," said the peer.

"That is not all. What will you say to the next scene? I am walking home slowly, about two a.m., and I see a carriage and some little confusion at a door. I hear a pretty voice rather excited, calling out to them to ring again, and certainly within the house you could hear the bells jingling away like pandemonium. What do you say to this turning out to be my little piquant heroine of the ball?"

"You came to the rescue, of course, as a gallant knight?"

"What was to be done? There was no chance of making them hear, and the poor child was quite bewildered. She was enchanted, however, to see me, her acquaintance of half an hour. Who would guess what was at the bottom of my little adventure? She had actually been shut out of malice aforethought! Those within heard perfectly but would not open. It seems she had wished to go to this party, and her husband did not approve, and this British savage had threatened, that if she did, she should not be admitted when she returned. This amounted to a challenge, which the spirited little creature at once took up."

"It grows exciting," said Lord Garterley.

"There was nothing for it but to find out some of her relations, drive off, and see if they could be roused. So we did."

Every one was now listening with genuine interest.

"We set off to her mother's house, which was not very far away. The good parent was reading in bed, it seems. She got up and let her child in. I saw them a few days later, when they were all gratitude, and I heard more of their history. I had then to go abroad, and when I returned I found that they had changed their house, and no one knew what had become of them. But I am on the track. I shall find them out yet."

"A very improper young person," said the bishop. "She must have been badly brought up, that you may depend on."

"It brings quite a picture before one," said Lord Garterley, in a reflective way; "especially as that waywardness suggests a character that some of us have known," he added, with intention. "Depend on it, that has all ended badly by this time. That husband was a weak fellow, affecting to be strong. If he does not take care—which of course he won't—it is certain to

end badly, in some scandalous catastrophe. I should really be curious to know what became of it. I pity those untrained poor little souls who are drawn to destruction by a sort of fate."

In this fashion was our Phœbe's story discussed at the glittering banquet of her connections. None present, save two persons, had an idea to whom the melancholy little story pointed, though some, like Lord Garterley, felt a sort of instinct, and thought how like it was to Phœbe.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PRINGLE NIGHT.

THAT night the usual round of entertainment went forward; the daughter of the house went through her regulation song, rivalling, as was stated, the peacock on the lawn; but there was an additional inducement. They had discovered "The funniest thing!" viz., that Lord Rotherhithe had a charming baritone, and was able to sing a most diverting song, known as an "'Orrible Row," which he had heard a humorous actor of the time sing with great effect, and which he now delivered, contending ineffectually with his laughter, and not exciting

that affection in any of the listeners, save in the case of the family.

Lord Garterley and the bishop talked in a loud voice all the time, as though striving to make themselves heard and secure a portion of public attention, a phenomenon that is often witnessed during performances even of more merit.

In some disgust, Mr. Brookfield left the room and wandered out on to the terrace. He was saying half aloud, and with natural impatience, "What idiots there are!"—when a figure stood beside him.

"You, Miss Lacroix!"

"Don't call me that name," she said impatiently; "I know that you despise me for such a device. I wish I could tell you how heartily ashamed you have made me feel of myself. And shall I confess to you? I did not even give you the true reason for the change; there was a pitiful equivocation in the idea, in choosing a name that I might say was a different one,

and also the same when necessary. I know you think that."

Rather wearily he said:

"I think of so many things that really I cannot recollect them all. In fact I hardly ever take the trouble to analyse my thoughts. Life is too short, and they are not worth it."

"Yes; I understand," she said, rather bitterly. "You think that I am not worth it. Yet, as I have told you, I wish for your good opinion. I beg for it; I have made confession to you. But I am too prosaic for you to take interest in; you require something dramatic—like the heroine you described. Yet with your judgment and sagacity, it surprises me that you should have been caught by the theatrical character of the display. You, a man of the world! And you spoke of finding her out again too?"

"Yes!" he said quickly. "It is seldom I have been so drawn by such a spectacle

of despairing helplessness. The image of that poor little struggling child-wife rushing to destruction has a sort of fascination for me. I feel that as I helped her that night, so I may be enabled to help her once more. Oh certainly! I shall find her again."

"She is not worthy of your thoughts—not for a moment," said she in a calm, steady voice; "and I know it."

"Know it! What! you recognised the picture? Why, where did you ever meet her?"

"First tell me the name of *your* heroine."

"I did not learn; but her mother's was Dawson."

"It is the same," said Miss Lacroix with extraordinary vehemence, and half to herself. "I have seen this coming; I knew it was coming. But is it not cruel, intolerable, that I, who suffered before at her hands, should now—"

Here she checked herself and smiled at his amazement.

"You are beginning to think that I am mad, or the oddest person you have ever met."

He was thinking of something else, and, to her mortification, did not seem to notice this self-depreciation.

"But do you know," he said slowly, and looking at her with a searching gaze, "do you know what has occurred to me? That my little heroine was the heroine of that affair to which the bishop alluded to-day—what occurred at the school. You met her then? I am certain of it; I see it in your face."

"Why should you assume that? I am not bound to confess."

"You asked me, recollect, to cross-examine you. So be loyal and fair."

"Unworthy and ungenerous of you! Unmanly return for my putting myself so much in your power! But I shall tell you

nothing now. I have quite misunderstood you."

"I can spell it out for myself. You show your hand so plainly. She has interfered with your plans in some way—carried off a lover then, or lately. The bishop, you know, said that something of the kind had been going on even at the school. Thus I put things together. You are a little vindictive; you dislike her, and have had a dislike to her ever since. I was struck by your face when I was telling my story at dinner."

"Then your sagacity is at fault," she answered scornfully; "though you have described, fairly enough, what might have been the state of the case. You don't read character, Mr. Brookfield, so well as you imagine. I can only tell you, you have done me the most serious injustice. I will own to you that you are right, so far as your speculations go, as to my humble proceedings; but you have not guessed

the struggle that has for years been passing in my soul, and how I have striven to do right and mastered a sense of injury, which few might have done. But it will be a different matter if the affair recommences. I, a poor, outcast girl, had found a home then: I was deprived of it by a caprice—'Sport to her, death to me!' Now, I have found friends and a new home for myself, where I am esteemed and have rest. If there be an attempt now made to drive me out of this, I will, this time, become the aggressor. There are some peaceful creatures that, at last, turn and fight!"

"How extraordinary all this is!" he said, "and incomprehensible! But I must tell you something more. Only for you to-night I would not have found a clue, and I now mean to begin a good Samaritan work, and strive hard to reconcile this poor little truant soul to her people here. And I have an instinct, too, that I shall succeed."

"No, no!" cried she, in a sort of terror. "You won't do that, or you will come to hate me."

"Oh, I must indeed, even at that awful risk. I would not hate any one; but, at the same time, I might begin to think you have some old grudge. This coincidence is so curious—that I should be actually under the roof of the persons that are so nearly connected with her—it seems almost providential. No, no, Miss Lacroix — I won't say Cross—this I must and shall do, and you will be generous enough to aid me in every way you can."

Here arrived a third figure, and the rough, jeering voice of old Sam was heard:

"What work is this, sir, holeing and cornering with my friend here?"

He had already noted the curious fascination that the guest had for his favourite, and he looked at him at times with a malicious and ill-natured glance.

"Come away, honeybird, I want you," said Sam. "You, as a ladies' man, are not doing your duty."

And he put her arm in his.

Miss Lacroix drew her arm away haughtily.

"Presently," she said; "you know I have told you often that these free-and-easy ways do not suit me."

Old Sam had to retire, grumbling and indignant.

"You are right to keep our friend in order. He is one of those that encroach. Now suppose we join the company."

"You are determined to mortify me," said she. "Pray go; but I shall remain."

He bowed and departed.

Left alone, her brows contracted, and she paced up and down the lonely terrace for many minutes.

"I see what it is coming to. He is destined to be her protector. She will snatch him from me also—destroy me. No," she

said at last, half aloud, "she shall never come under this roof—with me at least, for she seems destined to be my ruin in every direction. As at the school, so here now with him; those enticing, creeping ways of hers gain people, while I am to be set down as hard and uncongenial. But I am not called upon to make my life one current of self-sacrifice! I have struggled hard to master the spirit of revenge, but I am not called upon to be a victim. No, she shall *not* come here."

A servant interrupted her, bringing a letter.

"I thought the post came in two hours ago?" she asked.

"A lad brought this from the Joliffe Arms, miss," he answered.

She opened it and read:

"I could endure the suspense no longer. What have you done for me? You do not write. You do not think of me or of your

promise. I wish to see you. How can it be managed. Contrive a meeting someway. Recollect you once had a regard for me, till I forfeited it by my own fickleness and misconduct. But I have suffered for it since.

"F. P."

With a motion of impatience she tore it up into small fragments.

"Ridiculous, contemptible creature!" she said. "Such an appeal to sentiment! And yet the old selfishness just the same. But see how it all makes for her, as if a fate were playing the game. Ah! I shall be driven to be vindictive in spite of all my resolutions."

After a little hesitation she set off for a walk, took a by and private path that led to the village, and then strolled by the Joliffe Arms. As she had anticipated, he was standing in the doorway, smoking. She passed by without recognising

him, but he gave a start and followed her.

"How good of you!" he said, hurrying after her; "you will aid me — you will plead for me. I hear you are all-powerful with them!"

She turned and answered with a coldness and firmness that confounded him.

"You should not have come here," she said, "it will only bring you mortification. As for me, I can do nothing. You must understand that clearly. I could not help you without hurting myself, which I decline to do. You must go away at once; you will do no good here."

"I cannot," he said, in a sort of despair; "do take pity. You are my only friend. Surely you have not forgotten that you once liked me?"

"And that you once behaved treacherously! Let us say no more on that. You had better know for certain that I have forgotten your treatment of me, as

much as I have the whole episode itself."

"Alas! I have not," he said. "Oh how clever, how brilliant you are! If you only knew how superior I think you to myself, how I admire your gifts—"

"Hush!" she said. "I can hear no more of that. I only tell you, in your own interest, that you can do nothing here. Go up to the house and present yourself, and see what the result will be."

"Do you know, I think of that sometimes," he said desperately—"of walking in when they and all their fine company are seated at their rich banquets. The cruel, heartless race—and I their only son at their gates."

"Yes, like Lazarus," she said; "it is hard."

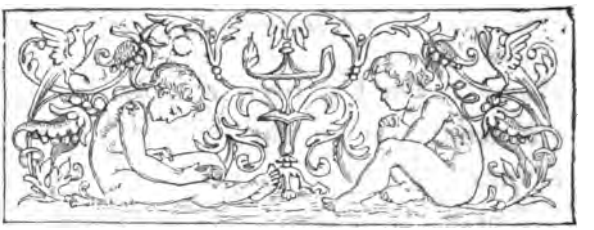
"But if you would but intercede—"

"I have told you before, I can only afford to look to my own interest. It would not profit you, and would ruin me.

Adieu! Think it over sensibly, and you will see that you ought to leave this place at once."

There was a curious excitement in his manner that now struck her for the first time, a flush in his face, and fire in his eyes.

"Don't make me desperate!" he cried, as she walked away.



CHAPTER IX.

THE FAMILY MORTIFIED.

It fell out that on the next morning, after breakfast, Mr. Pringle had arranged to take his whole party over to see a grand show-place in the neighbourhood belonging to a great lord, whom they knew in a sort of debatable way—that is, by much pressure and exertion, they had contrived an introduction at some party, which was the whole of the acquaintance. To say the truth, they were not at all eager for the expedition, feeling uneasy as to what it might bring forth; but there had been such an assumption of intimate acquaint-

ance : " Of course, you are always running over to Gules Hall ?" " I suppose you find the Guleses capital neighbours ?"—that the Pringles had only to reply with vague simperings of consent.

It was Lord Garterley who called out, decidedly—

" Oh, you must make a day of it to go to Gules."

And, in sheer desperation, Mrs. Pringle had sent over a man and horse with a humble and respectful letter, hoping that she might be allowed to bring a party of friends who were staying with them, and who were most anxious to see the Hall, on the next day.

A reply came from Gules Hall, in the manner of a late Duke, in which it was politely stated that the following day was the public show-day, when the castle was open to all comers, and that there was no need to ask permission.

This struck a chill to Mrs. Pringle's

heart. Still, she comforted herself by the reflection that Lord Gules had simply stated the fact; and she could not resist the pleasure of saying, carelessly:

"I have just had a note from Lord Gules. Unfortunately, it seems to-morrow is the public day, but you won't mind that?"

Accordingly, they started in three carriages, and went over the revered old pile.

"It's nearly twenty years—would you believe it?—since I have been here," said Lord Garterley, as they were passing through the Hall. "Fanny Gules was then a handsome young woman."

"What! then you know the Guleses?" faltered Mrs. Pringle.

"Lord bless you, well! By the way, you'd better go in and see them. She's in the drawing-room——"

"I?" said Mrs. Pringle, shrinking and dreadfully confused.

"I suppose she'll offer the party lunch? I'll beat her up. Where's his lordship?" he asked one of the servants. "Tell him that Lord Garterley wishes to see him."

The ladies gathered round Mrs. Pringle, and the ponies remained a pitiable specimen of fear and irresolution.

"I hardly know her well enough," she began.

"Why, I thought you said you were intimate!" he answered with some impatience. "Here! I'll settle it."

And Lord Garterley, advancing gaily, tapped at the drawing-room door, entered, and shut it, and from the loud laughter and hilarity the party without could see that he was well received.

Lady Gules presently came out.

"Which is Mrs. Pringle?" she said.

That lady was standing before her, a monument of hesitation and undignified confusion.

"Oh, won't you come in and sit down?

Pray do. Any friend of Lord Garterley's, I am sure—pray, do come in! All your friends also!"

And thus a sort of herd made its way in, Mrs. Pringle being last among them all, Lady Gules was most gracious and *empressée* in her manner, collectively, as it were. But old Sam, cowed at first, was now indignant at their undignified position, and at "the buck," so he phrased it, which his wife "had run upon them all;" and he now, with his usual prancings, made his advances to the lady of the house.

"A lovely place, indeed, madam, this of yours; and with a divinity as elegant and appropriate to preside over it! These are your lovely daughters, I presume, ma'am?"

The reply was a smile of astonishment and a cold inclination.

"We have a poor little shanty of our own, not far from this," continued Sam, not at all abashed. "We must get your

ladyship over there, and we will take all care of you."

The lady had that rather common reputation, in the aristocracy—of being "the proudest woman in England," and again merely gave an inclination of a smilingly haughty kind.

Lord Garterley was the person whom she honoured through the whole ceremony. The Pringle family had to talk to each other. As they were going away, Mrs. Pringle, in her favourite sweetly-smiling, hesitating manner, began to murmur—

"We have a number of friends staying with us—Lord Rotherhithe, Lord Garterley, and others, and if—er—you would not mind coming——"

The proudest lady in England smiled her off with the favourite inclination of her head—a most curious language, which she kept for such people. It was gracious, and at the same time seemed to push Mrs. Pringle away.

Mrs. Pringle felt embarrassed, and dared not press for a more explicit answer.

The other added then :

" Oh, some future time. Pray have more tea."

CHAPTER X.

THE PRODIGAL RETURNS.

When they were driving home, Lord Garterley said in a blunt way—

"I thought you was intimate with the Guleses. Otherwise we ought not to have invaded them with such a large party. It was hardly fair, you know."

During their absence a curious little episode was going forward. Mr. Brookfield did not care to be of the party, and had remained at home, as had the young lord, who considered such an expedition mere "rot," as he put it. The former gentleman had letters to write, and though

not using the young nobleman's unrefined phrase, held the same view.

There was a good deal in the place to see and enjoy—there were rabbits to be shot — the young lord was an amusing fellow enough, and his views of society, as taken from his own special point, were new to Mr. Brookfield. He had gone to his room to "rig himself out," as he put it, and Mr. Brookfield was going towards the hall, when he was attracted by a sort of discussion that was going on between the servant and some visitor.

"Well, then, I'll wait, I tell you; I shan't go away. You have no right to prevent me coming. Let me see some one."

"Very sorry, sir," the man was answering—with that respectful imperturbability of the menial for which they receive great credit, but is more nearly allied to dulness than is supposed — "but I can't admit you."

"I tell you I am Mr. Pringle's son."

"Very likely, sir; but the family is all out. They're gone to Gules Hall, to-day."

Mr. Pringle's son! This was strange indeed.

Mr. Brookfield at once came forward, naturally feeling curiosity as to the appearance of this oppressor of the heroine of his little adventure. He took his measure at once—petulance, folly, instability, fickleness, sulkiness—there was, besides, about his dress a certain air of decay and shabbiness.

"The family are away," said Mr. Brookfield. "You had better return later, if you wish to see them."

"This is my father's house," said the other excitedly; "and you see that I am refused admittance."

Mr. Brookfield shrugged his shoulders. Then, adroitly offering a sort of *juste milieu*, he put on his hat and walked out on the lawn.

The young man was as clay in the hands of that well-trained person. Mr. Brookfield appeared to listen to his story of grievances, while he, in reality, made the young man tell him all he desired to know.

Presently appeared Lord Rotherhithe, who joined the pair, having learned the quality of the new arrival. He declared it was "deuced odd," and seemed much taken aback at the discovery of the condition of the visitor.

After a short stay Mr. Pringle, who was sadly changed, and had become a grievance-monger, returned to his inn, declaring that he would come back in the morning and "make a row." In the evening Mr. Brookfield had a long conversation with Mrs. Pringle.

There was an odd change noticed in the behaviour of the young lord that night. He was gloomy, "short" in manner, and distant all the night; remained long at billiards; and clearly had something on his

mind. His appointed lady-love was bewildered by this behaviour.

Mrs. Pringle was greatly disturbed and put out at noting these symptoms, the more so as she could not account for them. She had, after all, the feelings of a mother, and when she heard that her son was almost at the very gate of her home, an outcast and in sore distress, she became at first a little agitated. But then followed the reflection how awkward and inconvenient it was; especially if any of the guests should meet him!

A pauper, out-at-elbows son, with a grievance, would be too discreditable; and if it got abroad! She was much put out, especially when Mr. Brookfield announced the intentions of the young man, and his proposed visit on the following day.

"Something should be done at once," said Mr. Brookfield. "Forgive me if I speak plainly, but these family difficulties are looked on as an affront by the public,

or rather by society, which desires that every one should have a laundry at home for washing this kind of linen. If you cannot be reconciled, why not let them have a small allowance and save yourself this host of inconveniences ?"

" I quite agree with you, and I am for it, and have said so all through. It is unchristian, and, as you say, inconvenient. But you know what Mr. Pringle is, and how impossible it is to get him to see things properly. On this point he seems to be really mad—talks of letting them starve and all that."

" What does Miss Lacroix say ?"

" Do you know she puzzles me. I sometimes think that she seems to influence Mr. Pringle in this view, though she counsels him. But really without her I could not keep Mr. Pringle in any order. He would disgrace us before all our friends."

" Well, I can supply you with an ad-

ditional motive for an accommodation. Lord Rotherhithe unfortunately met your son to-day, and you can see he is not a little changed, either by what he has heard or by what he suspects. I would certainly do something, and do it at once."

She thought she would speak to Sam; but the incurable old jester was at that moment giving a representation of the cachucha, as he had seen it danced by the charming Duvernay. "She had the loveliest-formed limbs you ever saw, and the way she leaped and glided would have done a bishop's heart good. See here, my honey-bird," he said to Miss Lacroix, "you stand thus. There was a twirling Frenchman, called Petty, that used to dance with her, and was like a gate-post for her to lean against, while she pattered round on her pootty little tootums."

And old Sam began to walk round Miss Lacroix in the style he described, causing inextinguishable laughter.

Lord Rotherhithe alone looked on gloomily.

Old Sam, who was selfish enough even to sacrifice the interests of his family to his own humours, was a little nettled at this gravity; for the young lord was regarding this "clowning" with a sort of stolid gravity that seemed akin to disgust.

"You don't seem to enjoy the little show?" said Sam, in a tart style. "What's the matter, my juvenile member of the Upper House?"

"It's a curious performance; but I've seen better," said the young man, turning away.

The ponies gave an imploring look; but it was of no avail. As soon as Miss Lacroix was released, Mr. Brookfield was beside her.

"Do you know," he said, "it surprises me to see you encouraging the exuberances of our host, especially as I believe you have some influence with him."

"You seem always ready to judge me

harshly," she said. "I would not behave so to you. But I have some little influence with him; he must be indulged sometimes, or he would be intolerable."

"Then why not exert it," he said, abruptly, "and reconcile him to his son and daughter?"

She turned away impatiently.

"Why not leave out the son? You are not much interested in him. Give things their right names. And what, pray, do you wish me to do?"

"To take the first step. It is easy. The young man himself was here to-day."

She started.

"Yes. I saw him—talked with him. There will be a scandal presently; his mother is willing to come to some terms. As you say you have influence with the person they call old Sam, you can do the rest. You will save this unfortunate young husband from misery; for I can see that he has found a way of forgetting his troubles."

"So you have arranged my part in this affair?" said she coldly. "You wish me to exert myself for your *protégée?* What if I decline the character for which you have cast me? Have you forgotten our conversation of last night?"

"Not a word of it; but what portion, in particular, do you refer to?"

"You require to be reminded, I see; it was too unimportant for you to recollect, because it concerned me. I told you that I was not called upon to imperil my own position; I am content to accept events as they come, but not to direct them against myself."

"That is a delusion, and the fiction does not blind me. The conclusion I have formed—forgive me being so brusque—I still adhere to: and that is, that you must have some secret animosity to this poor child."

"Poor child!" repeated the other with scorn.

"Yes, such she is. You are afraid

that her presence here may interfere with your views as to some one in whom you are interested. I acquit you of so vulgar a passion as revenge or vindictiveness. Ah! you are colouring! Very well," he added, turning away, "since such is your programme, here is mine. By to-morrow we shall have brought about this reconciliation, and the young man will be restored to the bosom of his family. There, Miss Lacroix! And a day or two later I hope to see this poor, injured little wife enjoying her proper place here!"

Miss Lacroix said nothing.

"Now, mind," he said, almost sternly, "I keep you to your own declaration—no opposition—or, at least, only passiveness——"

"I have declared nothing," she answered excitedly. "I keep no terms with you. She shall not come here. I reserve all my own power of acting in any way I choose."

Then, suddenly:

"What have I done during our short acquaintance to make you dislike me so?"

"So speaks one school-girl to another," he answered, laughing. "There are few persons one takes the trouble to dislike."

The following morning old Sam appeared in a very bad humour.

"Come into the study with me," he said to Adelaide. "Did you hear the new game that's up?—they want to force back this fellow on me. I'll not stand it; a disrespectful, empty-headed jackass, that's ruined his family. And that pert mincing chit that he calls his wife: I don't want to have her here, taking airs and ordering us about!"

"Is it settled," asked she calmly, "that they are to come here?"

"They have been crying and caterwauling all night about it, afraid of losing that young Rotherhithe. I don't care, I'm

sure. I'm not going to strip myself bare to settle a girl in life."

"Is it arranged, then?" repeated Miss Lacroix.

"Oh, I suppose so. And then again, she's no great love for you, my dear."

"I shall give her no opportunity of showing her likes and dislikes," answered Miss Lacroix haughtily. "It will then be time for me to leave."

"What, go? She shan't turn you out —no, if she were never to come under the roof."

"I can only go out in the world as I did before. But I neither wish to prevent her coming here, nor have I any desire that she should come. I simply and selfishly regard my own safety."

Sam did not try even to understand; but kept repeating:

"Turn you out! She may just stay and starve—just stay and starve. No, no! Sam shall be master in his own house for that."

That day at luncheon-time, precisely as Mr. Brookfield had predicted, young Mr. Pringle made his appearance, and was introduced to the company. It was rather an interesting ceremony, and dramatic also.

Strange to say, it was the young lord to whom the reconciliation was, in a great measure, due. How, it will be shown later.

Every one felt a little subdued as they thought of the reconciliation that had taken place; the mother was glad; and even the ponies showed something of that one touch of nature which makes the whole world akin. The young man was not a little bewildered and overwhelmed; it did seem likely that the troubles through which he had passed had had a chastening effect.

Old Sam alone, who had really enjoyed being the only person of his sex that had importance in the household, looked at him with glowering and hostile glances.

But he never had a liking for him, in addition to the natural distrust with which the average sire regards his offspring and heir.

It was a rather trying situation; and the young man looked round at the pictures and the splendid state with a feeling as though he was in a dream. Mr. Brookfield sat at the table also, and Miss Lacroix saw, with uneasiness, the look of good-humoured triumph that was on his face.

CHAPTER XI.

SORE DISAPPOINTMENT.

We may now take a glance at Phœbe's household, or rather at her mother's, which offered an extraordinary contrast to the scene we have just quitted.

Hope would seem to have departed from those mean and straitened apartments. Mrs. Dawson, burdened with the support of her son-in-law and daughter, found it a hard task to make the two ends meet—indeed, scarcely attempted to do so, and waited in the hope of something turning up.

This pressure, too, was not lightened by

the behaviour of the gentleman, who every moment seemed to resent the sense of obligation, and found relief in constant conflicts, or "rows"—as he styled them—with his mother-in-law. The accommodation which was dignified by the name of apartments consisted of the invariable first-floor—the small ship's cabin joined by a little archway, much like the opening of a sentry-box, to the back room, and which were ennobled by the title of the front and back drawing-rooms.

The place was a little narrow street in the purlieus of a fashionable quarter, known to country folks as Coleshill Street, and over which hung a dingy air of gentility.

Here they dined, and here they "sat," as it is called; and here Phœbe looked from the window at the coach-house opposite, where they seemed to be washing the carriages all day long. She grew at last, as she sat in the window, to regard this

monotonous occupation—the wheels revolving, the splashing water, the refreshing "slushings" from the buckets—with extraordinary interest.

Here Phœbe sat all day long, and waned and pined, the little fair cheek growing paler, the buoyant heart more hopeless, as she now saw the romantic dream of her young life rudely dispelled, and the idol she had chosen was proved to have the clay feet which all idols have to a certain extent. Even this she could have endured, but not the too plainly revealed feeling that he no longer cared for her—that he was sick, disappointed, and, as she sometimes feared, "longed to be rid of her."

It was, indeed, likely enough this would soon be accomplished—but not in the way she fancied, for since their change of life he had fallen into a habit of going out at night, and returning home very late clearly the worse for drink; and his cheeks, as

has been mentioned, had begun to show the florid "bull's-eye" of the professed toper. He was not strong, and it was not unlikely that, if matters went on as they had done, he might indeed be rid of her by the simple mode of withdrawing himself from the world.

As she watched the carriages being washed, and which again seemed to symbolise her lonely and miserable state, her thoughts often wandered away to that contrasted figure—her brave generous rescuer—the chivalrous King Arthur, who was so noble, and gallant, and delicate; who had ridden away like so many other knights, and had never come again. There was no one, then, in this cruel, wicked world, in whom one could put faith now. But she had thought that so brave a gentleman —— well!——"Oh that Heaven had made me such a man!" this, or some such idea, was often in her mind.

Mrs. Dawson, a worthy woman in her

way, had grown tired of all these disagreeable scenes, and fancied she had done sufficient for her children in giving them a home and shelter; so she herself went abroad, to parties and on visits—for she was very fond of pleasures of that kind.

Meanwhile, the pressure of old debts and difficulties continued. Of course the young man was harassed as usual, and made ineffectual head against them, while Phœbe, in her innocent way, began to "wonder that he could not put his shoulder to the wheel, like other men"—a phrase she had picked up from her mother—and get rid of all these people.

One morning, indeed, she read in the aristocratic record which her mother took in, and read religiously, of the brilliant doings down at Joliffe's Court, and she cried out eagerly, and with her old sense of fun:

"What a lark it would be if we both set off, and went down to them! They couldn't send for the police to turn us out;

or if they did, that would be the worst that could happen to us."

Mr. Pringle uttered an impatient exclamation, and his favourite words, "So idiotic!" came to his lips.

This Phœbe resented with her little pert retort, which she kept cut and dried for him:

"I know who every one says has been the greatest idiot in managing our affairs."

But as Mr. Pringle flung himself out of the room, and from the room into the street, the idea began to appear to him not altogether such an inferior one. That remark of Phœbe's, that even in case of failure their situation would be no worse, commended itself; and, of a sudden, he came to what seemed to him the desperate resolution of going down. He disdained to be communicative, but he had simply said to Phœbe:

"I am going away for a day or two."

"What! leaving me?" she said, with a

start. "And why? Where are you going?"

"No matter to you," he said. "It's only for a short time. I am quite sick of this life."

"As you please," answered Phœbe coldly; "only pray don't drink."

And so he departed, with what happy result we have seen.

No letter had come to Phœbe to tell of his proceedings, and so she sat and sat on at her window, watching the everlasting carriage-washing. Her mother was absent, so she was left alone.

It was a wet day, naturally darkened by the streams of rain that came down unceasingly. Poor, deserted, blighted Phœbe! She was thinking, with a sort of despair, how all her life now only promised to be like that dismal day. No hope, and no home—nothing but slow wasting away!

Suddenly her door was opened, and the

maid of the lodgings—"the apartments," we should say, an euphuism equally comforting and elevating to the letters and the tenants—showed in a gentleman.

It was he, the gallant, peerless knight, returned!

The light broke through the clouds, and Phœbe, before she had collected herself, rose up and ran towards him.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you again! You can't imagine how miserable I am."

"Poor child!" said he, in a tone of the deepest sympathy. "But I bring some news. Can you bear it?"

"Oh, tell me! What is it? Not that——"

And her face grew clouded; she thought it might be something connected with her husband.

"It is all made up. You are going to be happy again. Your husband is at this moment sitting in the centre of the grand company at Joliffe's Court, in the midst of

his own family. All is forgotten and forgiven."

"Oh, delightful! charming! How happy I am!"

And Phœbe chirped and fluttered about the room like a little thrush.

"But we owe all this to you; I am sure we do; you are so good and kind. I knew you were my friend, after all, though you did desert me."

"Desert you! Indeed, no. I have often thought of your case, and tried in my little way to aid; but when I found myself, by a most extraordinary accident, in the very house of your people, I determined to seize the occasion and do my best for you."

"Then we *do* owe it to you? I knew it. I am so glad of that. I would sooner owe it to you than to any one; but I must go down at once, must I not?" she said eagerly, making as though she were going to get her things.

"Well, not for a day or two," he said,

smiling. "He was on the ground, you see, and that removed all difficulty; whereas, you—you will hear to-night, probably. I came up on a little business."

"I thought you came on purpose to tell me," she said, disappointed.

"Well, I did," he said, after a pause. "We can always find business waiting for us; so that also was true. I must go down again now, were it only to look after your interests. I could not resist having the pleasure of coming to tell you, and at the same time give you a little advice."

"How kind you are!" said she, with sparkling eyes. "Indeed, from the first time we met you have been so good to me; I shall never forget it. And now, what do you advise? for, indeed, I want advice sadly."

"Well," he said, "I would counsel you to be very firm and decided with this family. Insist on your rights. Now that all has been arranged, you are entitled to

your place and position, so all that is wanting is a little firmness. There are people there—your own father-in-law, for instance——"

"You mean old Sam!" And Phœbe began to laugh.

Then suddenly she said gravely, "No, he doesn't like me."

Phœbe's trials had given a wistful look to her face, and a brightness to her eyes, that made her unusually attractive. The visitor was delighted with her naturalness and the genuineness of the impulses which prompted all that she said. As he went away he said:

"There are the highest of the high jinks going on at your place. Delightful sound, that of 'your place!' is it not? So you must get ready to start as soon as possible."

Visions of dresses, and of one of the great black boxes, were already floating in Phœbe's head. Indeed, she could scarcely contain her delight, and the joyfulness of

the news that he bore was reflected to the message. Again, oh that Heaven had made her—well, not exactly such a man, but had imparted to her husband some of his native chivalry and delicacy!

Never had Phœbe slept so sweetly as on that night. She telegraphed the glad tidings to her mother, asking her to come at once. The only thing surprising was that no letter had come from her husband. With a curling lip Phœbe explained it to herself:

"What does he care about me? He would let me find it out from any one."

That night arrived Mrs. Dawson in equal excitement. She, too, had visions of the gates of Joliffe's Court being thrown open to her, and of entering in her child's wake. Dresses must be got, etc.

But while they were exchanging their congratulations, the post brought two letters—one from Mr. Pringle, junior, the other from Mrs. Pringle, senior.

pitiful exhibition of your power, such as it is."

"I told you that I wished to please you, and to stand well with you. You laughed at the notion. I may now take a freak of making you respect my abilities, if you will not my character."

He shook his head.

"This is all very childish, excuse me for saying so. I was talking lightly. You turn everything into a sort of melo-dramatic or high tragedy vein—why, I am sure, is incomprehensible to me. As it is, I can see nothing to admire or tolerate in the exertion of your power over that Grimaldi-like personage, our host. Titania herself might be proud of such a conquest! Then you exert this power to gratify the most unworthy and cruel vindictiveness. I confess it astonishes me."

"If you suppose that I am capable of telling the truth——" and she paused. "First let me ask, do you?"

He laughed.

"I must only move the previous question, for I can neither oppose nor support the motion, I know you so slightly. But of course you do."

"I can assure you, then," she said with great calmness, "you do me much injustice; no such motive has directed me. I would have been quite content to leave this place, go out in the world again, or take to a religious life, as they say. There are convents, Church of England convents, where I am sure I should be happy. Mr. Gaunt is always talking of one at Stonehewer."

"'Get thee to a nunnery,'" said he, laughing. "Well, I confess that would be the last thing I should have dreamed of for you."

"Then you do take some interest in me," she cried, with brightening face. "Come, now, say that you think well of me, that you will try and do me justice, at least as much justice as you do to that

other person in whom you are so interested, and I will promise——"

He grew cold and hard.

"No, Miss Lacroix. That last little transaction—I know you too well. Our judgments are independent of us, recollect."

And he went away carelessly to another part of the room..

She looked after him with a look of bitter vexation. She was roused by the rough voice of old Sam:

"I see that prig has been boring you," he said. "He's a regular schoolmaster, a lecturer, a fellow that would peep and botanise over his mother's grave. On my soul he interferes too much."

Miss Lacroix could not help thinking of Mr. Brookfield's description of Sam himself as a sort of "Grimaldi."

Many of the numerous visitors at Joliffe's Court were greatly puzzled as to what could be the real character of this

installed guest, as, indeed, the reader may have been already. But she was well-known in the district as a person of strength of mind and character, though her rather cold and decided manner had not gained her friends. Among these was the new curate.

Mr. Prettyman, the "fidgety" young curate, had passed away to another and a brighter sphere—had, indeed, been promoted to a High Church benefice in Brighton, and his place had been taken by an ascetic whose face seemed carved out of boxwood, and who was named Gaunt.

Mr. Gaunt would not sing or dance (as of course), or dine out, or even smile. He wore a black coal-heaver's hat—as it was called by old Sam—and a Noah's-ark coat, under which some declared there was a hair shirt. He seemed to consider most ladies as persons to be "reclaimed," and in this uncomplimentary sense had fixed on Adelaide Lacroix as a special convert.

That lady had at first been amused, then had tolerated his exertions on the ground of their being well meant, and finally had allowed herself to be enrolled among his proselytes, taking her instruction from him, and forwarding his good works in the district.

This grim pastor went to work in a very different spirit from the flattering curate. He was not to be trifled with. He did not joke. Though he was not popular, he was respected. Old Dr. Potts was quite gained over by him.

Young Mr. Pringle, during the early days of reconciliation, was like a boy during the holidays. His spirits rose; he was enchanted with all that he saw; it was a new life to him. But, above all, he followed Miss Lacroix with a simpering interest and curiosity, and seemed eager to recall that little episode at Miss Cooke's academy.

"You have never forgiven me my be-

haviour on that occasion," he said. "I can see it in your looks and manner."

"I have no one to forgive," she would answer. "I assure you I have long since forgotten it."

"I see," he would answer, wounded. "It was not worth while recollecting."

"Well," she answered, "I don't care to make comparisons; and really, the truth is, I had forgotten it—your share of it. I would say no more about it," she continued. "You know it is not a complimentary transaction, or an agreeable one for me. You treated me in the most wantonly cruel manner, and led to my expulsion with disgrace from the school. I have had to change my name in consequence. I am of a sensitive nature; it has clung to me all through this time; so, if you would oblige me, please make no further allusion to the matter."

He stood humiliated. Then said:

"After all it was not so much my fault. I was more sinned against than——"

She turned on him quickly.

"Really? Are you—I won't say truthful, but accurate? Are you certain of that?"

He answered eagerly:

"Indeed, yes; it was an infatuation at that time." He added hastily, "Of course, since then I have grown to like Phœbe, though she does not understand me, and I fear is not suited to me. You know that I was pledged to you. Why should I have deserted you, unless——"

"Nothing could be more logical," she said, "excepting that you did thus desert me, or 'throw me over,' as the phrase is. However, I have no malice or bitterness to you on that account. But I cannot profess to say that I would go out of my way to do you good. For instance, it seems to have been expected that I should move heaven and earth to restore your wife to

her home here. I think *that* would be a little too much. I am not called on to do that. But there shall be no obstacle put in the way of her coming, so far as I am concerned."

"But if you would quite forgive me," he said. "Indeed, I deserve nothing from you."

There were a good many little conversations of this pattern, Mr. Pringle finding a piquant entertainment in thus trying to remove what he considered unreasonable prejudices. Indeed, the days flew by in a series of delights, and he felt like one released from prison.

And it came to pass that thus Phœbe's absence was not felt at all, and it seemed indeed eminently desirable that she should remain where she was for the present.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAM STANDS.

THOUGH this grand merry-making at Joliffe's Court was officially announced as to last but a fortnight, the family found it more magnificent to prolong the festivities by relays of visitors — notably the county people, with whom they were now on more intimate terms; thus making their society like one of those "pepper-pots" so well known in the West Indies, the food in which, though daily suffering loss by consumption, is kept up to its full strength by regular additions. In this way there were people always coming and going, and even coming back.

But one morning official news was brought in that Sir Gilbert Homerton had retired from the representation of the county, and that the seat was vacant. He had conveyed notice of this to a squire of position, who it was determined by his brother squires should succeed him. But the lord of Joliffe's Court, old Sam, was determined to "stand," to spend money freely, and appeared at breakfast in great excitement.

"Papa was going to stand!" the ponies were henceforth to repeat to every one; while Mrs. Pringle murmured the strain, but in more stately language: "Mr. Pringle was about to come forward for the county."

There were no bounds to the candidate's extravagance, for, in addition to his usual buffoonery, there was added an arrogance and self-sufficiency, as though he had already secured his election.

"They ought to be glad to get a man

of position and wealth," he said, "instead of those starved, hungry, country men. I think we know how to keep it up pretty well, and do credit to the suffrages of the potwallopers. We've not done so badly already in this house—eh, Brookfield?"

Without answering the question, that gentleman merely said:

"But do you think the life will suit you? Is it not very late to enter on such a wearying life."

"Oh, nonsense! You don't want to make me out an infirm old man, do you? You're not quite so young, my friend, yourself, as you'd have the young ladies believe!"

"Indeed, no," said the other, laughing.

"But would not your son be a more convenient candidate?" said Lord Garterley. "It seems more the sort of thing, you know. Eh, Miss Lacroix?"

Old Sam's brow contracted, his large

mouth tightened; he looked spitefully at the young man, who said:

"I am willing enough to come forward."

"I dare say you are, sir, and willing enough to take my place altogether. Better be content with what you have got. It's more than you exactly deserve, for a gentleman on probation such as you are."

"You appealed to Miss Lacroix," said Mr. Brookfield, "on the point. We have not heard what she says."

That lady had, no doubt, time to reflect, for she answered promptly enough:

"Well! I should not imagine that you," turning to the son, "were at all suited for Parliament."

Mr. Brookfield turned away with a smile.

"At all events," he said to the father, "you will enliven the House with your jokes. It likes to have a humorous personage. When the word goes round that 'Pringle is up,' every one will come rushing

from their dinners, the untasted morsel left upon the fork, to hear the torrent of jokes delivered in your best Shakespearean jester style."

"Yes," said Sam complacently, "I think that I will touch them up a bit."

"But you must not mind that encouragement," said Miss Lacroix; "Mr. Brookfield does not mean everything he says."

"Eh? What! You think so?" said old Sam, the nasty expression coming back to his capacious mouth.

From that day very busy times set in at Joliffe's Court. The whole family and their guests could talk of nothing but Sam's candidature, and in their several and utterly useless ways, devoted themselves heart, hand, and soul, to the task of bringing him in.

The most amusing feature of the transaction was a meeting at the large schoolroom of the village, where Sam invited the constituents to meet him and "hear his

views," which he delivered from a platform, and which, it must be said, justified the worst forebodings of his friends. It was a most singular performance.

"What I want," said Sam, "is to sit for the ladies. Give me the bright eyes, the dimpled cheek, the rosy lip. That's the sort of vote that I love—the bo sex, as a French writer had called them. I want to be M.P. for the bo sex, and if the bo sex do their part, I shall be returned. What were his principles? they would ask. Why, that every pretty girl in the parish should have a silk gown and smart bonnet to go to church in. That is my notion of a State Church, or of going to church in state. You mustn't tell Mrs. Pringle" (who was not present, anticipating some such exhibition) "my remarks, for between ourselves, she was uncommonly jealous, and I am afraid I sometimes give her very good cause to be jealous. I am proud, that is, I mean deeply penitent, to say so."

In which strain Sam continued for a full half-hour, to the surprise of a good number of his hearers, and certainly not to the improvement of his chances.

In the same strain, or vein, however, old Sam proceeded to stump the county, as it is called, not receiving the most favourable reception, or, at least, not a flattering one where he was favourably received. For the bumpkins laughed loudly at these extraordinary fooleries, while old Sam believed that he was making great way with the lieges. The family, like all the "newly-rich" folk who are in the hands of others, simpered pleasantly as they told how "Papa was worn out canvassing," and failed to see what a tremendously good joke it was considered in the county.

"I am surprised," said Mr. Brookfield before Miss Lacroix, "that some of those who profess to be friends of the family have not the courage to speak candidly to them

of this most ridiculous proceeding. It is cruelty not to do so. I attempted it, and was duly snubbed for my pains."

"I am one of the degraded beings you allude to," she said, "is it not so?"

"Well, I do not *exactly* say that the speech was meant for you," he replied.

"It does not strike me in that light," she said, in her calm way. "There is a vast number of persons in the House of Commons that you would consider ludicrous and contemptible. 'Grimaldis' you would call them."

He was a little put out at this turn. This was new. She was attacking him. But she had seen the cloud, and the next moment she was saying in an appealing way, "Forgive me; I get exasperated sometimes; you lay yourself out so to mortify me. And I really don't deserve any sympathy or to excite even curiosity."

She must have had the most persevering and confident of natures.

"I must go and write my letters, or I shall lose the post," he said, and with a bow left her.

She looked after him, and said to herself: "Then if his *protégée's* interest be damaged by this conduct it is he that is to blame. She will have to thank her protector for that. How dull, how blinded he is!"

It has been mentioned that among the guests was a certain Miss Eglantine Newton—a curiously vivacious little creature—that lived a butterfly life, fluttering away from one country house to another, alighting on the little sprays of society. She was innocent, piquant to a degree; coquettish, slight in figure and size; with a delicate complexion, and small features.

But whatever were the gifts of this sunshiny being, her chief merit was in smoothing away the rigid, natural contrariety that must have existed between herself and her years, for, alas! she counted

over some fifty summers! She was, in short, "a young thing," that had made a pact with Time, disdaining the advances of "that annoying old man;" and by cultivating a youth of manner, as well as of speech — a youth of limb, of laughter, and the rest — had really contrived to make herself accepted in this juvenile capacity.

Of course this cost her extraordinary fatigue, and it caused her ceaseless trouble to sustain her character. But she never flagged an instant, and was perpetually in motion, both in mind and body. She always dressed, too, in the gayest colours, and her costume seemed to hint at a sort of school-girl airiness. As she almost lived at country houses, she was universally known; and the more profane christened her "Eggy Newton," or simply "The Newt."

She would sing and dance, and act plays, and, above all, "gush," and pout when

"people were cross to her." The engaging young thing was "the life and soul"—at least, such was her own idea—of every company; and she fell desperately in love, and flirted, exactly as young girls did.

When Mr. Brookfield appeared, she became, as it were, entranced:

"What a noble, commanding face! Oh, what a man, my dears! And such a musical voice! Oh, he shall be mine, and nobody shall interfere with me."

This was a favourite expression of hers, and enormous had been the number of persons she had thus hero-worshipped.

Before many evenings were over, "The Newt" was seen to trip over to Mr. Brookfield—her little person was arrayed in gauze or tulle of the most diaphanous kind—taking with her a little cushion, on which she sat down at his feet.

"*May* I sit here?" said Eggy inno-

cently. "I won't interrupt, if you'll only let me look up at your face while you speak."

"Certainly," said he good-humouredly; "only you have chosen a very inconvenient position. Let me get you a chair."

"No, no, no," she protested; "unless you mean it as an excuse to get rid of me."

"Just as you please."

And he resumed his conversation where he had left it off. But the fixed gaze of the curious little being at his feet, the old face on the juvenile figure, and the drollery of the situation, was too much for him, and he burst into a roar of laughter.

"I can't go on," he said; "it really *must* be a chair."

"You don't like to be worshipped," she said reproachfully.

"I have never been lucky enough to know what the feeling is."

On going to bed Miss Eggy would insist that nobody but Mr. Brookfield should bring her her candle. As he held it out to her, lighted, she looked up into his face with a sort of wistful, trusting expression.

"Well," he said, "what is it now?"

"Only—but you wouldn't——"

"Probably not," he answered. "You hit me off admirably. 'I wouldn't' has always been my war-cry."

"Well, let me whisper it," said the elderly *ingénue;* "not that I would mind anybody hearing it—I should be proud of it."

"No, no," said he, rather alarmed; "it must be our little secret."

"Well, stoop down;" and she whispered to him.

He looked impatient; then shook his head.

"We shan't be friends," he said, "if you go on in this way."

Eggy, however, told her female friends

that all she had asked was to be allowed to "kiss his clever hand!"

From the very first Eggy Newton had taken a dislike to Miss Lacroix, principally because she noted a sarcastic smile upon her face as she went through this performance. She soon learned, too, that of the whole party Miss Lacroix was, perhaps, the only one disinclined to accept the fiction of her being juvenile.

This was exhibited on one special occasion when Lord Garterley was calling for a game of lawn-tennis, at which it was his delight to score—with both eyes and mouth open — and an eagerness as though he wished to catch the balls with the latter organ.

"None but the young people are to come," he cried out. "It's to be a juvenile game."

"But Miss Newton must," said Miss Lacroix; "or you will, at least, let her look on."

This affront had never been forgiven.

From that time the vivacious *ingénue* seemed particularly to watch her enemy. Mr. Brookfield held those conversations which have been recorded; and whenever she saw the pair thus engaged she would flutter down and perch near them. She watched them carefully with a jealous care, and seemed to have taken it into her head that "Miss Lacroix was laughing at her."

But she took care to point out how attentive Mr. Pringle was growing to Miss Lacroix, and how that young lady seemed to be encouraging his attentions.

In less excitable moments the son would seek Miss Lacroix, and appeared to take pains that his attentions should not be noticed. What was the character of the confidences that he favoured her with could not be guessed; but it is certain that she told him that after a short stay it was his duty to return to London and join his wife.

This he might now do, as all had been accommodated with the lawyers of the family, and old Sam had agreed to give an allowance. On so happy an occasion Mr. Pringle hurried up to town to be himself the bearer of the good news.

Other persons had now begun to remark that young Mr. Pringle was fond of little short walks down to the Joliffe Arms, whence he would return much flushed and thick in his utterance.

"Ay," said his father, whose dislike to him seemed to have been intensified; "he has learned fine pot-house habits. That's a creditable successor to be in my place—a hopeful son and heir indeed!"

There was some reason for this sour tone adopted by Sam towards his offspring. The enormous extravagances of the family now required additional supplies to meet it, and it was absolutely necessary to raise a large sum. There were the expenses of the coming contest, which it

was estimated would reach ten or twelve thousand pounds. The Pringles, when they came in for the estate, thought it would look territorial and ancestral to make a settlement of the estate, which they repented of so soon as it was done.

The estate, therefore, must be "opened," as it is called; and Cooper and Co. had just been down with a view to this arrangement. This may have been the secret of the kindly forgiveness so readily extended to the eldest son, whose co-operation was absolutely necessary for the process of "opening," as though one were speaking of an oyster. But he was not so compliant as would have been expected from one lately in so disagreeable a position; and, as is usual with weak minds, presumed that the concession was due entirely to some merit or power of his own. At first he made excuses, and put off the matter, and when pressed declared that it was unfair to ask him to

sacrifice his rights—at least for the present. He must look about him first.

The rage and venom of old Sam at the delay even, may be conceived.

CHAPTER XIV.

PHŒBE DESOLATE.

PHŒBE had been wondering and wondering at the strange proceedings by which she was interdicted from enjoying what was her lawful home. After the first exhilaration on the resumption of ease and comfort, there came suspense and doubt. She was not a pariah—a disgraced being—to be thus excluded. There was her great box, and some new dresses; and she was quite ready to go down and take her part in the festivities. But Mr. Pringle seldom wrote, and when he did write, wrote shortly, and to the one strain :

"The family would not receive her; they must wait; trust to time and the various chances which might turn up."

At which mark of contempt Phœbe's delicately-cut lip would quiver. She could not understand it.

At last he arrived. Phœbe was enchanted to see him.

"Now we shall go back together!" she cried.

"Nothing of the kind," he said; "but my people have behaved most liberally. You ought to be eternally obliged to them. Only fancy—seven hundred a year! That's to be the allowance."

"Oh," cried Phœbe, in delight, "we can do all sorts of things with that. But," suddenly turning grave, "why did you stay away from me so long? Do you know what I have been afraid of," she added innocently; "that there has been some young lady there—some one you have been flirting with?"

This unintentional speculation brought the colour to Mr. Pringle's cheek.

"Why should you think that?" he said. "Oh, no! we had a pleasant house — a number of people; and, of course, I made myself as agreeable as I could."

"Who was there?" asked Phœbe shortly. "Tell me the names."

He mentioned them, and, last of all, in a rather hurried fashion, named Miss Lacroix."

"Who is she?" said Phœbe quickly.

"Oh, a sort of companion for the girls," he said, turning away his head. An action that Phœbe did not notice, though her mother did.

"What an odd name!" said Phœbe. "Is she French or English?"

He grew nervous at this question, particularly as he felt the mother's eye upon him. It would never do that Phœbe should find out that her old friend and

enemy had come forward in this curious way, so he answered impatiently:

"Oh, I don't know. How can I tell?" Then he eagerly turned to unfold his news. As for the amount which the "governor" was to allow them, Phœbe could not tell whether to think it magnificent or the extreme of meanness. Her little soul had no standards to measure things by, and she took her opinions from those sagacious minds about her who had plain and decided opinions. It might seem, certainly, a large sum to her, and a smile was beginning to hover about her eyes. But her mother said that "it was beggarly. People with such fortunes should be ashamed of giving a pittance like that."

Phœbe, on hearing this bold language, grew grave; she detested shabbiness of every description. Her lips were curling at this affront.

"Don't let us take it," she said; "they must be made to give us more. I'll speak

to old Sam myself. What day are we to go down?"

"Oh, not for a long time."

"Not for a long time?" said her mother. "What work is this? No one ever heard of such a thing. Who is at the bottom of it?"

"I am sure I can't say," said he.

"Then you ought to say. To let your wife be insulted in such a way! I wonder at your want of spirit! You ought never to have set foot in the place until she was admitted with you."

"How can I help it? We must only wait a little until they come round."

"I am going to take Phœbe for a week to the sea-side, poor child! She wants change. You must come too."

"Oh, I have to go back," he said, "to-morrow."

The mother fixed her eyes on him.

"Go back to-morrow? Why?"

"Oh, because— Well, I am the eldest

son, and I've to entertain the people. They expect me."

Mrs. Dawson said no more; but that steady, searching look made Mr. Pringle feel uncomfortable.

"You will be glad to hear," she said, "that Tom will soon be in town."

He stamped with impatience, answering not the words, but the ellipsis.

"What is that to me? I won't see him, or listen to any of his low, vulgar bullyings. If any more of this goes on, it will have to come to an end—setting a fellow like that at me, if everything isn't to your liking! I know who puts him up to this; and if it isn't stopped, it will be worse——"

"Don't make such a fool of yourself—threatening your poor wife in this way. You needn't see my son, if you don't like. What does all this mean, pray?"

"Oh, you know well enough," he began.

"Oh! so I know! Well—Only it would be prudent not to awaken Tom's

suspicions. He is so devoted to his darling sister that he might take it into his head to go down——"

"Do you know it would be a capital plan, mamma! Tom is so wise; he would settle everything."

Here Mr. Pringle turned pale and red alternately; for he felt that if Tom did go down, he would *not* "settle everything," but would certainly find out a good deal and give it the worst colouring. He had a good mind to checkmate "the whole set" —for he was beginning to look on them all as a league of opponents banded against him—by a bold defiance, and telling them openly of the cause that detained him; and this bold *coup* might have been successful, but he had not the courage.

However, Mrs. Dawson's suspicions were aroused, and she was convinced that there was some influence at work, other than that of difficulties made by the family, which was working to prevent her child's

return to the home where she was entitled to be.

It would be necessary to act cautiously and delicately; perhaps so cautiously as not to act at all. For she felt that it would be difficult to gain an entrance to Joliffe's Court, and that there were no means of doing so. She was determined, however, that she would not wait very much longer, and that by some means or other her child should be placed in her proper position. And with this resolve she went into the country for a few days—as she was one of those persons that must have their "glass of wine," or their week in the country, regardless of everything.

Phœbe was too low spirited to go with her, and piteously begged to be allowed to stay. It seemed as though in London she could keep her eyes fixed more directly on what was going on in the country. She was a nervous, fluttering little soul; very excitable, with a feverish-

ness of mind which so often leads to a feverishness of body. This perpetual strain and expectancy had the most wearing effect; her mother, with an effusion of affection, was too busy to note symptoms, though when any illness came, she would be the most devoted of nurses, and, it must be added, the "fussiest." Our Phœbe at first fretted, then began to pine and languish. This current of "crosses" and ill-luck began to tell upon her. She was left alone in the dreary, weary lodgings, with no one to speak to but the servants; no companions to whom she might prattle all her thoughts and sympathies—pleasant or distressing, as the case might be—and thus find enjoyment or relief. No one would have guessed from her bright eye that she was ill; from the "gameness" of her nature she disdained to let it be seen that she was in this fevered or nervous state. The feeling was gaining on her every hour that she had lost her hold on

"his" affections—"he," "him," "his," with her always standing for that one object—and that her life in future was to furnish dismal evidence of this mistake.

And yet this long period of desertion was not without its effect on Phœbe. She was, as it were, thrown in upon herself, and made to reflect. In her case the "uses of adversity" became more or less "sweet." First, the sense of blank disappointment began to work; the delicate bloom of romance which had lain on the surface of her tender nature was being rudely brushed away. She was seeing life in all its hard, rough outlines. This was a new and painful revelation, and, indeed, had much to do with her illness. She had set out on life as though it were to be a sort of delicious dream, or the transformation scene of a Christmas pantomime. She had conceived that there would be no difficulty as to "paying;" that the goods of the earth were to come to her without

trouble; that when such an ugly thing as a bill arrived, it represented the money with which it was to be paid as a matter of course, just as a bank-note did sovereigns. Then there were sicknesses and sorrows; but these were to be read of and compassionated at a distance, but could not, in the nature of things, touch her. Above all, there was to be no such thing for her as that grim, practical being "her husband," but a lover always—that tender, romantic being, with youth ever on his shoulders, and ever devoted to her.

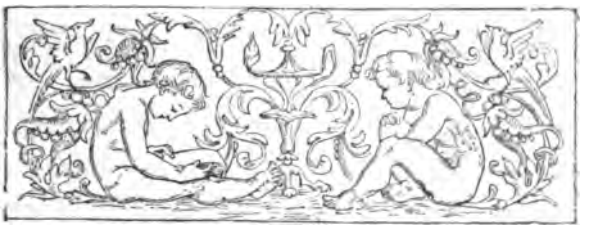
It was this last *désillusionment* that had chilled her heart, and almost made her shiver as she thought of it. The delicate silver cords were snapped. What had taken the place of the unsubstantial image was ever before her — a cruel, uncongenial man—always cruel and harsh to her, and, as she had begun to believe, actually hating her. Here was the shock, here the pang. Again and again it came back upon her,

piercing her little soul as with a sharp dagger. The thousand instances—first of coldness, then of cruel speech, then of plain, open dislike—would return to her again and again, and with it a feeling that all was closed for her; that there was nothing to look to—nothing to hope for.

But, as we said, this cruel chastening had its fruit, and this perpetual discussion within herself, and continued speculation upon what had occurred, led to the hardening of such purpose as was in her little soul. The thought that most preyed upon her was that she had given away her affections, and that they were lost to her for ever.

Then it was that with a pining, wistful longing, she thought of the generous, manly heart, which she knew had such an interest in her, and which had already helped her in so chivalrous a style. It was some pleasure to her to think of that night, and

the memory of it often came back to her. But he, too, had deserted her like all the rest, or, like all the rest, set her down as a child. Poor child Phœbe!



CHAPTER XV.

THE CONTEST.

FROM which glance at Phœbe's sad little household, we now turn our eyes away to that of the Pringles'.

It was a delightful alteration when that eminent visitor, Mr. Pratt-Hawkins, made his appearance one evening, having, as he explained, been just able to get away from the duchess's, "where they had Moulsey, Wrigley, and the Sarks;" all the personages thus alluded to usually enjoying their fuller style and title—as Lord Moulsey, Lord Wrigley, and the Earl and Countess of Sark. However, it was not meant disre-

spectfully on the part of our friend, but merely to show that he was on the most intimate terms with those noble people.

The pleasure of his company was in the nature of a surprise; and it was curious that he had not thought of coming until he had written to, and received an answer from, his friend Lord Garterley, in which he had been made certain that there were some distinguished guests either arriving or to be expected.

With him came the Shortlands, whom he met in the train, and with whom he made his triumphal entry. Indeed, it was Pratt-Hawkins's theory that when he came to stay with persons of this doubtful class, who, as it were, kept hotels for the entertainment of the genteel, that he did not live with the landlord but with the guests; and in this way he was not contaminated. He found, however, that the Pringles were greatly improved—they had acquired more "certainty of manners;" though there was

some trace of care on Mrs. Pringle's brow; and Sam, with all his pseudo *bonhomie*, had grown very rough and bitter. They had already begun to want money. The estate had not turned out nearly so profitable as they had believed; the amount of ready money left by old Joliffe was not so abundant; and they were being pressed by the great London tradesmen.

Then there was the great business of finding the dowry for the young lord and the "pony" that had been selected for him.

Old Sam, from his previous training as a land agent, had learned a good deal about money matters; and now that he had come to regulate his own affairs, was proceeding to screw as much as possible out of those that were dependent upon him—the tenants on his estate. Already the "genial" Sam, as some of his lady friends conceived him to be, was known as a grasping, oppressive landlord.

In these duties he had the assistance of Adelaide, whom he delighted to call his "little secretary," and who had to repair to his study every day, for the purpose of assisting and putting his papers in order. Indeed, all the Joliffe papers were in a sad state of confusion; and "one of these days," which seems about as indefinite a period as "the Sunday in the middle of next week," or the Greek Calends," it was resolved that there should be a regular "overhauling," as it were, of those dusty accumulations.

"My heart is broke with these things," old Sam would say; "only for you, my dear, I'd be at my wit's end. You are an invaluable secretary."

And in his coarse way, Sam, when allusion was made to this curious sort of assistance, would wink knowingly, and say—

"Perhaps she is qualifying for the place. And why not, sir? She will suit it

admirably. Where could a more charming Mrs. P. number two be looked for?"

When the listeners seemed, as they often did, taken aback at the coarse strains of jest, Sam would laugh loudly, and protest, "it was only his fun," and that "he'd joke if he was given over by the doctors."

"Oh, Mr. Pringle, at such a serious time, how can you?"

"Serious! Not at all. I'll never be so near recovery as when those gentry give me over."

But he was now engaged on what he considered most important business—"a revision of his rental," and was hunting up all his leases, etc. There were two radical farmers whom he had canvassed, and who had shown a most insolent spirit of independence, as it appeared to Sam. These he had determined, in his own phrase, "to mark" and "root out" of his estate.

Their names were Packer and Butt; and

no names were so often heard at breakfast-time, and dinner, at Joliffe's Court, the proprietor being never weary of announcing all that he intended doing in reference to Packer and Butt.

Unfortunately for his plans, when he came to consult the leases, papers, etc., connected with their holdings, he could not find them. They would appear to be lost in the confused mass of papers belonging to the Joliffe's Court estate. On this Sam's faithful secretary came to his aid, and Miss Lacroix, bidding him tranquillise himself, with a smile declared that she would make a thorough search for the papers. And thus, for days, she had devoted herself to this task, exploring all the dusty tin cases, and turning over all the yellow and greasy bundles which had been lying undisturbed there for years.

What, again, it might be asked, was the motive at work in this young lady's mind?

She seemed to be of too independent a character to be "currying favour" with "old Sam." Was it gratitude to the family who had been so kind to her? Or was it connected with a little conversation she had with Mr. Brookfield?

She always seemed anxious, as it were, to justify herself in his eyes.

"I am sure," she said, "you are thinking it curious that I should devote myself in this fashion; but I have a reason, and a good one."

"I am sure you have," he said sarcastically. "Mr. Pringle takes care to let us know it. Why should you not make yourself acquainted with what, so he informs us, you are hereafter to administer?"

She coloured.

"I thought that you would know more of the world than to accept his comic speeches for gospel. But I have long ago seen that you have the most contemptible opinion of me. You are inclined to set

everything I do down to the meanest motives. In this instance there might be reasons. We, who have but little—the paupers of the world—cannot afford to be so noble and disinterested as others. Perhaps, too, I may have the power of keeping him in some restraint. Don't judge me so harshly always. I wish you would not."

"Why?" he asked with some curiosity.

"You have paid me that compliment on one or two occasions before now—of wishing to have my good opinion. Now, once for all, might I ask you the reason?"

"You would have a poor opinion of me were I to tell you. If you would only say what you think I ought to do; but it is very hard for me to know——"

He smiled.

"Well, such anxiety to please," he said, "would disarm any one. What the worth of my good opinion could be to you is a mystery. But possibly I may be doing

you injustice. Rightly or wrongly I have taken it into my head that you are the only impediment that exists to making this a happy household. Show me that you are ready to do what is in your power—to do what is honourable——"

"There again," she said, "you are unjust to me. I assure you solemnly I have no concern in this alienation. As you can see yourself, the family is not anxious to have this daughter here; the husband also——"

"Ah, there!" said Mr. Brookfield, "now we approach the point of the whole. It appears to me that indirectly you encourage him in that."

"But why are you so concerned for her?" said she, looking at him with a keen gaze. "I might as fairly ask you this question: What is the secret of this wonderful interest about a person that you have seen only on a few occasions? I repeat, I might as fairly put that question to you. But it would be too inquisitive on my part."

Slightly embarrassed, he answered:

"Pity. She is so helpless and so unfortunate."

"And have you no pity for others, who may not have been cast in the same dainty, piquant, china-figure mould? I have not those infinite pretty graces; but still I am entitled to fair consideration. If you knew what I have suffered, you would be more indulgent."

"You mean from your old school-fellow and friend?"

"At school I was a poor, helpless dependant. I was in the power of the two task-mistresses of the place, who knew that I was their slave, because there was no place on the earth where I could turn to. There was no house or home open to me. I was like one of those coolies that are brought over on a pretence of being free, but are the slaves of their employers by ingenious contrivances of the law of freemen. They knew this, and turned me into their

drudge, their Smike; and by-and-by I was to be one of their 'lady teachers;' and then I should have been their property altogether."

He looked incredulous.

"Poor Miss Cookes," he said; "what a terrible sketch you give of them! They are certainly not known to be such ogres among their fashionable connections."

"There, again! You mistrust my account. Well, I wished to be released. By some strange good fortune I met a person that liked me, or thought he liked me."

"And you?"

"Whether I liked, or thought that I liked him, does not matter now. At all events there was release, freedom from the hateful tyranny. The delight, the happiness at my approaching disenfranchisement was inconceivable. The sun began to shine for me once more; hope to spring up. Unfortunately I confided in what is called a friend."

"You mean in her—Phœbe."

"Yes," she said scornfully. "You like to repeat that name. I confided in her, and you know the rest. She offered to help me to speak with him; for he was a poor, uncertain creature, contemptible in every way. Through some presentiment I declined; when, unknown to me, and through a vile spirit of vanity or coquettishness, she interfered between me and him; and in a secret, cruel fashion, succeeded in winning over to herself the person that was to have rescued me. Think of one so young and so crafty. My friend, too—my bosom friend, as it is called. I could never forgive it."

He remained silent for a moment.

"After all, you could be mistaken; one so young might be thoughtless — or foolish."

"You are ready to find excuses for her," she said impatiently. "I only tell you what occurred."

"And this admirer is now her husband? But that only makes your course more distinct. You are under the same roof with him. She is not."

"That is not my fault. Still, I have confidence in you, though you are her friend and not mine. Mind, all I have told to you is a secret. You shall say what I am to do. Shall I go to the heads of the house, and tell them that they ought to bring home their daughter? It will fail, I know, and it will be my own destruction as well; for, as I said before, it will be my own ejectment. I shall do this to please you; yet by this very act I shall deprive myself of the pleasure of ever seeing or meeting you again. It is you, you see, who will turn me out on the world."

After a pause, he said:

"Perhaps I am a little unreasonable. Well, you will promise me this; to do what you can sincerely, and in all honour

— let events take their course — and, at least, not oppose? If you promise that much — well, as to that good opinion you are so anxious for — well, we shall see."

"I am to be on probation; my lord and master graciously allows it. I accept and promise cheerfully. There, you shall see from this hour how good I shall be."

As she walked away he looked after her and said, half aloud:

"Strange being! Still, I do not know whether I could ever trust her."

She went her way with a sort of elation.

"It is a sacrifice. But still I would do more to gain him. He shall love me yet, and before her. Oh," she thought, "were he but to yield! were I to conquer his proud nature! Then it might be we two against the world. But it is too much to contend against. Nothing will get over his secret mistrust of me! What infatu-

ation makes him form that idea of her sweet and pastoral innocence? He little dreams of the craftiness that is within her young soul."

These thoughts passed through her mind as she took her way from the house, much softened, and in a very sad and pensive tone of mind. She had gained some way, and this feeling always gives comfort. She was in no mood for Sam and his duties; and she did feel a certain shame as she thought of the remarks that must be made on her obsequiousness.

"But what am I to do?" she said. "Only let me get something to depend on, something that will save me from being at the mercy of events, and then we shall see. It is easy enough to be independent when one has resources."

The party at lunch this day was a large one. Bishop Drinkwater had returned after a short absence, and had announced that he would comply with the request

of the incumbent, and preach a sermon on the following Sunday. There was a loud clatter of voices, in the midst of which old Sam entered in a very ill humour.

"Here's pretty work," he said, "a fellow starting up to oppose me. That Allen, the chap that was here so long with the last man. Did you ever hear of such impertinence? But there's somebody behind him, I know."

Mrs. Pringle looked helplessly from one face to the other. They were certainly most unfortunate, for people of their wealth, to be worried in this way.

"What is this Allen?" said the bishop; "one of those democrats or communists?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Sam impatiently; "belongs to the mob—the 'Canal,' as the French say."

"It's all one," said Bishop Drinkwater; "you must oppose a firm front to him. I

fear you are hardly the candidate to defeat him."

"What d'ye mean by that?" said Sam angrily.

"It should have been one of our solid university men," said the bishop, not in the least conscious that he was depreciating his host, or, perhaps, scarcely caring whether he was or not. "Oh, it was a great mistake, a great mistake."

"As great a one as making you a bishop," growled Sam in a low voice to his neighbours, and then went on to dwell on the cost a contest would entail on him. In short, he was worried to death among them all.

The news was quite true.

The election was only about a fortnight off; but the new candidate was formidable enough. He had a sort of ready eloquence, and harangued meetings at the very gate of Joliffe Court, holding up Sam as an oppressor and a griping landlord. Sam

was, indeed, not popular, and was a most unlikely person to win the suffrages of the electors. But what was most damaging was the fact of this person declaiming on his own wrongs, and denouncing the Pringle family as usurpers.

Mr. Brookfield had happened to be passing by the common one afternoon, when he was attracted by one of these meetings, and drew near. The rustics were listening attentively to a tall, excited man, who spoke with animation and purpose on this very theme, though there was a sort of wildness in the strain.

"These people are the intruders. I believe there has been foul play of some kind. The place is ours—mine—by right. You know me, all of you; you have seen me here for years back. You know how the good old man—now in his grave—felt towards me and mine. How he would have given me all he had, and, I believe firmly, did give me all he had, only a few

hours before he died. He told me himself that everything was to come to me; and so he did, and so he would, but for the foul play there has been at work. He was signing papers all that day — he was a secret man. Who knows what these people may have found, or may have done with what they found? But never mind. It will be brought to light yet!"

Mr. Brookfield listened with much interest.

"How curious," he was saying to himself, "that those who are disappointed so invariably impute malice or fraud to the person that disappoints them. How poor old Sam would laugh to hear himself thus portrayed as a villain."

"Well! what's that, Batts," Sam said impatiently, as that menial brought in one of the coffee-coloured envelopes which are to be inseparably connected with tidings of good and evil, "more nuisance, I suppose?"

"For Mr. Francis, sir."

Sam opened it without scruple; read it with a "pish" of disgust.

"Why can't people write these things? Here, take it to him."

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope?" said Pratt-Hawkins.

"His wife's ill, and of course wants him at her side."

"Mr. Pringle's not in his room," said Mr. Batts.

"Then he's out in the grounds. Let him be looked for."

"Oh," said the bishop, "why, let me see. Didn't I meet him as I was taking my ride to the church? Yes; of course. And then, at the church, I found that—er—" and he made a disagreeable gulp—"that lady that's staying with you."

"Miss Lacroix?"

"Yes, precisely."

There was a silence.

"If you will give me the message," said

Mr. Brookfield, "I will take it at once to him, and hurry him home. It is absolutely necessary it should not be neglected for an instant."

He rose, took the paper, and hurried off.

A mile or two from the house, in one of the by-paths which led across the fields from the church, he espied two figures in earnest conversation, that of Mr. Pringle and Miss Lacroix.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. PRINGLE RETURNS HOME.

He hurried up at once, and put the paper into his hand.

"Explain to him," said she to Mr. Pringle, in great agitation, "that you followed me—that I did not wish it—that I bade you return."

"There will be no time for these interesting explanations," said Mr. Brookfield coldly; "neither have I any desire to hear them. You had better not lose an instant," he added, turning to Mr. Pringle. "The carriage is following, and the train leaves in half an hour."

"You do not believe me, then?" she said.

As he did not answer, a malicious glance shot from her eye.

"Pray do as Mr. Brookfield directs. In your absence he is guardian and protector."

Mr. Pringle darted a look at his companion. For the first time, a feeling of doubt and suspicion came into his mind. Curiously connected with it was the disagreeable recollection of Tom Dawson, from whom he had endured so much that was odious and galling, and whose place, it occurred to him, this gentleman seemed to take. He turned sharply on him:

"You are very disinterested in this matter. Pray, might I ask why are you so anxious about my household matters?"

"Don't lose any time; we'll talk of that when you return," said Mr. Brookfield. "See, here is the carriage! Now, get in!"

"Get in?" repeated the other, in fresh

vexation. "Do you take to ordering me?"

But the carriage came up, and the party got in and drove back to Joliffe's Court, there to wait to take on Mr. Pringle.

As Miss Lacroix got out, Mr. Brookfield said to her, with genuine contempt:

"I am really ashamed of myself for having been taken in for a moment."

She answered the contempt of his look rather than of his words.

"It is to be war, then? The war I carry on is always in the enemy's country."

"Come," said old Sam suddenly — "Come, honeybird and secretary-general, what are you at there? Quarrelling? Just let me know if he worries you. You will come and help me to-day, won't you?"

Miss Lacroix swept by her enemy triumphantly, and went to the study as she had been invited. She threw herself heart and soul into the business, and very soon

the mass of confusion had begun to take shape under her orderly arrangement.

As he was hurrying away he suddenly turned aside from the hall and looked in at the study, the library, and all those various rooms where the company used to resort at idle times, but without finding what he sought.

"Where is Miss Lacroix?" he called to the butler. "Ask her to come here."

"There is only a few minutes to the train, sir," said Mr. Batts, looking at his watch with an air of some reproof. "Indeed, if I was you, sir, I'd leave this alone, and go at once."

Our hero had a special dislike to the dignified Mr. Batts, which dated from the contemptuous manner in which that official had received his designation of "*a fellow like that.*"

"You are very impertinent," he said angrily. "Do as I tell you."

"I take no orders from you, please sir.

But I can only tell you this, the whole house is talking of your goings on; and by-and-by it will be the public."

Mr. Pringle was almost speechless at their freedom, and yet his whole soul was secretly pleased — flattered, at his name being associated with hers. Without answering he went to look for her, and found her in one of the innumerable little "morning-rooms," walking up and down angrily, as though she were trampling on and crushing flowers.

"I thought you were gone," she said.

"I only wanted," he said, "to say good-bye. What is the matter, though? Have they been annoying you?"

"Annoying me!" she said. "But you cannot expect me to be in the most charming spirits, with the prospect before me."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"You will miss your train," she said. "Never mind me. Go, now."

"But I want to hear you tell me, now—quick. There is plenty of time."

"Understand, then, it will not be my fault. I cannot force you into the carriage."

(This was characteristic of the speaker, and her favourite way of defining her position.)

"I shall probably be gone," she went on, "before you return."

"Gone!" he repeated.

"Yes," she answered; "you don't suppose that I shall stay here to receive the treatment that is in store for me when you bring your wife back? I shall not wait to accept the mortification of defeat—linger on here, and endure the degradation of the airs of victory of one who once injured me so deeply, and now seeks opportunity of repeating the injury. No, I shall take the more dignified course—go first. But it *is* hard, and I have done nothing to deserve it."

"But you are not to go. And she is not coming here. She is ill. She will do very well where she is."

"Oh, *you* say this; but you are powerless in the matter. You will *have* to return with her."

"What a contempt you have for me," he answered bitterly; "and how you delight in showing it."

"What! Not gone yet! You have lost the train!" And Mr. Brookfield was standing before them.

Adelaide looked at him defiantly and even triumphantly.

"Go," she said, "I do not detain you, recollect."

He hurried away, Mr. Brookfield following him.

"This is most extraordinary," he said; "you should, really—even for the sake of humanity and decency—"

Mr. Pringle could not resist saying:

"I understand. Your interference is

quite intelligible. But don't trouble yourself about me, please."

He got into the carriage, and the coachman drove *ventre à terre.* But it was in vain. As they came to the bridge he pulled up his horses.

"There she goes, sir," he said.

Mr. Pringle felt his cheeks glow.

"Always bringing me worry of some sort," he said to himself. But he could not bring himself to drive back and face the crowd at home. There was no other train that day, but he said he would take the down train, which was shortly due. "And," he added, "you needn't say anything, you know, of my having missed the train."

"That will be hard not to do if I'm asked, sir."

"You're all ready enough with excuses when it's your own affair," said Mr. Pringle as he walked away.

The man looked after him with no very

friendly expression. Already Mr. Pringle was disliked in the establishment.

Yet almost as soon as the carriage had driven away, Adelaide, left alone, stamped impatiently on the floor.

"I did not mean it. But it was too much. I was driven to it! As I stand here, I never intended departing from that fixed purpose of letting events take their own course. But what can I do? Oh, it is beginning to break upon me, that he does love her! I see it coming! She is destined to ruin me in every way. Even now it is drawing on; but let her take care. I have been passive as yet; but I cannot endure this perpetual misconstruction from him; if he will think the worst of me, the time has come when I must protect myself."

CHAPTER XVII.

A CRUEL HUSBAND.

When Mr. Pringle arrived in town and made his way to Coleshill Street, he found a carriage that seemed all springs, and with red wheels, patiently waiting at the door. It was that of Dr. Sparks — one of the numerous "eminent" men that drive about the metropolis in similarly easy-springed vehicles with fire-engine wheels.

This was a little brisk man with mutton-chop whiskers—the friend of his patients—in high repute and immensely sought. He had known Phœbe as a child; but the volatile little creature had forgotten him, or

was fond of saying that "he was a foolish old thing," having also been attracted by the superficial ways of the newer doctors. Now, in her sense of desertion, she thought of this friend, and sent for him. Nothing could be kinder or more good-natured than he was, and he it was that Mr. Pringle met as he entered.

"Now, my dear sir," said he, "you ought to have been here before. The poor child upstairs is in a very critical way."

"Why—what's the matter with her?" said the other.

"She is wearing and fretting herself—suffering from neglect. This is telling on her delicate frame. Her frame is too slight to bear all the chafing. If you wear a thin silk stocking long you will soon find it breaking into holes, so take care."

Rather abashed and put out at this lecture, Mr. Pringle hurried upstairs, and found Phœbe very thin and wasted, but with hot fiery eyes. It was not on this

occasion as it had been before, when all was love and effusion in her welcome. She now greeted him with a languid distrust.

"You have deserted me," she said faintly; "what have I done to you that you should treat me in this way?"

"I came as soon as I could," he said, turning away his face.

"But you got the telegram yesterday, and you wouldn't come. You had some amusement that kept you — you want to kill me, and get rid of me, and have me out of the way. And I think you will succeed."

There was a little hand-glass on the bed — a significant circumstance. She was sadly altered; black circles round her eyes —cheeks hollow and sunken; but she had made an attempt at decking herself out with a little cap and ribbons which Perkins had been made to put together. This was some of the little old coquetry. She was

terribly changed, it appeared to Mr. Pringle. He was touched at this spectacle; and felt some pangs of self-reproach.

He would try and make amends, and be devoted, as he ought to be. Perhaps, too, he thought he would "get her well," as soon as possible.

"You will be all right soon, darling," he said; "you must have change of air—go to the sea—and the fresh breeze will pull you up."

"Yes—and you will go back and enjoy yourself—I understand. But I won't go—no—no——"

This was a curious change in her, this suspiciousness and querulous hostility.

"Oh, I'll go with you, of course," he said.

"Why didn't you come at once?" she said abruptly, fixing her fiery eyes on him. "The telegram got to you early. We told mamma it would be in time, and she looked herself at the Bradshaw."

He was confused.

"I missed the train," he said, "I was delayed."

"What delayed you? you were amusing yourself with some one and not thinking of me."

Here entered her mother, very grave, and with a face of reproof.

"You should have come before," she said to him; "the delay has made her worse. What was the reason?"

"There is no use talking of it now," he said impatiently; "I couldn't help it — I came as soon as I could. Shouldn't she go to the sea?"

"That's not to be thought of for a long time as yet. Her recovery will be very slow."

When they were out of the room she put on a grave face, and closing the door addressed him with solemn warnings and adjurations. She then sat down opposite to him, and began to speak in her old prating way.

"Phœbe has been almost at the point of death; and your behaviour has been most extraordinary. Why didn't you come before? What would you have done if she had died when you were amusing yourself?"

"Oh! I was attending to our interest. Only for me the reconciliation would never have been brought about."

"I don't know as to that," said Mrs. Dawson. "It does not seem likely that you could have managed the matter."

Mr. Pringle coloured. He had acquired an awkward trick of colouring at every allusion of the kind.

"But that is no matter now," she went on; "the point is this, we have made up our minds, Tom and I."

He started up impatiently.

"Is that fellow come back on me again——"

"Don't speak of Tom as 'a fellow.' I'd advise you not, at least, before him. Yes,

Tom has returned, arrived last night. You may be sure we didn't tell him of the way you have behaved, or he would have been off this morning and surprised you in the midst of your junketings."

Mr. Pringle thought with discomfort of what the effect of such an intrusion would have been, and congratulated himself on having escaped it. But the idea of this "Tom" terrorism recommencing made his heart sink, and filled him with rage. But he felt he must submit for the present.

"And what have you and your son settled on, pray?" he asked. "This cannot go on."

"As soon as Phœbe recovers the family *must* receive her. Do you know what I suspect and what Tom suspects?"

Again he coloured.

"That you are not as anxious that your wife should be restored to her proper place as you ought. That you have some reasons for keeping her away from what

ought to be her home, that you are playing into the hands of your relations."

"I! no," he faltered.

"Yes you are," she replied. "But it makes no matter now. That's settled. My child must not be sacrificed in this cruel unfeeling way. Why, her poor little heart is fretted away. That's what's the matter with her. It's positively barbarous the treatment she's met with since her marriage."

Mr. Pringle was inclined to do battle on the challenge thus given to him, but he felt, from old experiences, that it was sickening work thus contending, that no profit came from it, so he let it pass.

In the course of the day the irrepressible Tom made his appearance. He had, as usual, met with a turn of luck, but this, fortunately was of a different kind from the last. He was, in short, "upon his legs again." His greeting to Mr. Pringle was of a rough kind.

"I see it don't do, my being away. You can't be left to yourself, my lad. I must always be here, it seems, to look after my sister. A pretty state of things, when she has got a husband!"

"Now, look here, Mr. Dawson, I'm not going to—"

"No, you're not, of course. I wish you were going to behave like a decent good fellow. But we must try and teach you, my boy. Well, how are you getting on down at the ancestral place? You are up to some tricks there. You had better take care. We'll find you out."

Mr. Pringle made a sulky reply. Phœbe was in the next room, so he was obliged to speak in low tones; indeed he could not trust himself to say what he thought.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS LACROIX REFUSES TO GO.

AMONG other plans for forwarding his success in the contest, old Sam had determined to give a grand entertainment to all the neighbours from far and near. Of what kind this should be was long debating. The Newt grew passionately excited.

"Let it be 'Tableaux Vivants,'" she cried. "I will appear as Fenella, and the Maid of Athens. I have the dresses ready at home. Or let us get up charades! They are so amusing. I will arrange them all for you."

However, the ponies and Mrs. Pringle

did not quite see the merits of this proposal; they had an instinct that they had not the training sufficient to make an effect in this description of exhibition, the credit of which would all go to one or two of the visitors. They preferred the idea of a gigantic ball, an enlarged edition of the famous one that they had given in town. Ecstatic night—how often they had looked back to it, as the inauguration of their delicious and successful career in fashionable life! Every one should be asked, and the famous artificer who "threw out" the canvas chambers and built the great pavilions at the back of the house should be brought down specially, and set to work.

This idea seemed so delightful that it was determined to carry it out without delay. And almost at once the hum of preparation set in.

It had taken the shape of a fancy ball, rather a difficult task in the country, but

the Pringles were enthusiastic and did not take note of difficulties until they were too far embarked on a scheme to go back. Then they were oppressed and overwhelmed by them.

The invitations were sent out far and near, over the length and breadth of the land. A new batch of guests were bidden, and emboldened by their success, such as it was, they ventured on "asking down" some exalted personages, with whom they were but very slightly acquainted.

They were now, also, looking forward to a glorious and ecstatic day at the Church of the Elect in the temple erected to fashionable Matrimony at the Square called Hanover, when the streets would be blocked up by the swinging caravans and nobly emblazoned rocking coaches of the glorified ones; for the prospects of the junior pony had brightened, and the Rotherhithe alliance was nearly accomplished.

Many were wondering how it was that

Miss Lacroix retained her influence in the family so long, and what was the spell she contrived to cast over them. Mrs. Pringle and the ponies were seen to be almost affectionate in their public demeanour to her. But there was a little affair in progress for which her wits were eminently useful; and this by her cleverness she had almost brought to an issue. They had an almost superstitious reverence for her abilities and genius, and being so helpless themselves this feeling was absurdly exaggerated. With all this, however, when they found that their guest was gradually becoming the leading figure in the festivities, that the ponies were overlooked, and that "the family" itself was tolerated only as caterers or entertainers; when the sense of this modifying situation began to press upon them, they began to show a certain *aigre* feeling to their friend.

This, as was only natural, grew more developed, and took shape in "cuts,"

and a certain coldness. And when young Lord Rotherhithe began to show signs of deserting the junior pony and devoted a whole evening to Miss Lacroix, the feelings of the family amounted to fury, and in an agitated council held that night in mamma's bedroom, accompanied by sobs and hysterical bursts, it was concluded that it had gone beyond all bearing, and that the artful Lacroix must be dismissed at once. They would not put up with it a day longer.

The following morning she found a complete change in their treatment of her. Mrs. Pringle was cold and cutting. In fact she hinted broadly that Miss Lacroix's room would be very useful for a new guest.

"There is no need to hint such a thing, or to take the trouble of beating about," said the lady promptly. "I do see plainly you wish me to leave—is that so?"

"Well, after the way you have treated the girls—"

"You mean because Lord Rotherhithe paid me attention last night. I didn't invite it or wish it. I tell you that in good faith and honour as your friend—perhaps one of the few true friends you have."

"I don't see it in that light," answered Mrs. Pringle angrily.

"You are foolish and will repent this. You ought to implore me to stay. You will lose him altogether if I go."

"Oh, I dare say," began Mrs. Pringle.

"Now do believe me; it is for your interest that we do not quarrel. I wish to stay myself: I have a reason. I assure you after what you have said, I should go at once. But as for Lord Rotherhithe—if you knew what he said to me. Come, you know you have found it to your interest on two occasions—so just turn it over before you decide. I repeat, you ought to beg me to stay. It rests with myself after all," she said, smiling, "whether I remain; for, you know, if once 'Sam' comes to learn it,

he will detain me by force, but I promise not to call in his aid."

A hurried council was held, composed of the mamma and her daughters.

Those mysterious words "Lord Rotherhithe had said to her." What could it mean? Adelaide had certainly always shown herself truthful, fair, and candid—certainly careful of their interests; and the elder of the ponies, who was more thoughtful than the rest, suggested that it might be worth while ascertaining what they were. Adelaide was and had been useful. There was a feeling through the house as to her power, and the purpose with which she said everything. It would be as well not to be in a hurry.

Adelaide Cross alone in her room paced to and fro, in a sort of agitation. "To be cast forth on the world again," she said to herself; "but I cannot, I will not go; I must gain him first; he will despise me if he sees me treated in this fashion, and he

will at once guess at the reason. What contempt he will feel for the adventuress thus foiled and baffled in her schemes! No, I cannot give up this chance, this hope—I must stay even if I endure mortification!"

That day the young lord, who, as we have said, had been "moody," and was pronounced by Pratt-Hawkins and other cynical friends to be trying to "get out of it," told Mrs. Pringle, in a sort of blunt, defiant way, that he must go away.

"Oh! but you won't," said the lady in her smilingly helpless way. "You won't leave us now — and the ball coming off——"

"Oh, the ball!" he answered, with a tone that really seemed to mean "Hang the ball!" "I have been here too long—I want to travel."

Mrs. Pringle turned pale.

"Oh, surely you won't do that!"

"Why not?" he said. "Every fellow travels. I had a letter from my father

You see a fellow can't remain shilly-shallying here doing nothing. No, please I must be off to-morrow."

This was a blow. Mrs. Pringle, though she was ready enough with appropriate speeches to those who were her inferiors, always felt herself unnerved and feeble in the presence of the aristocracy. She could only smile again, rather piteously, an operation, it may be conceived, without result.

This news was soon known, and caused sad trouble. The ponies were in despair. As they sat with their parent, affecting to do some "work," they debated the situation in the old helpless way.

"It's all Francis, who will do nothing for his sisters. He must be made to do it."

"But how, ma? I hope his foolish wife will never be let inside the doors—never."

"I fear that will not punish him very much."

At this moment Miss Lacroix was seen passing the windows outside, on the way

to the garden. The three turned away their eyes impatiently.

"I am glad she's going," said the senior pony, now transformed into a bitter enemy. "She shan't stay a day longer. She's at the bottom of it all. An ungrateful, selfish thing."

Suddenly the younger pony, always considered rather frivolous, and without any of the worldly sagacity imputed to the elder, said:

"Do you know, ma, what I was thinking? Hasn't Francis taken a fancy to Adelaide Lacroix?"

"Oh, my dear child! don't talk in that way! It's not correct. If you made such a speech before people—"

"Well, you know what I mean, mamma. She could get him to do anything. And if you asked her to make him join papa and open the estate—"

Mrs. Pringle started. The idea commended itself on the instant; nay, it

seemed a certain deliverance. How stupid of them not to have thought of that. It was the very thing—it must be done at once. This was what Miss Lacroix alluded to when she said that they would be sorry for turning her away.

Without losing a moment's time, Mrs. Pringle rose, got her hat, and hurried out to the garden after her friend. She was one of those persons who are unburdened by delicacy, and did not fear graduations or "shadings off" when they wanted to "go back" from any step they had taken.

"My dear," she said, running up to her, "you mustn't go away. I won't hear of it."

"I told you you would come and ask me to stay," replied Adelaide. "There, you needn't say what you wish; I will try and do my best."

"You will? You are really good and generous. You see we have been so put out by all this opposition, and the poor girl is worn to a thread."

"I did not notice that," said Adelaide coolly. "It is a strong argument for doing something. Well, you may depend on me. Of course after I have succeeded—that is should I succeed—you will again turn against me. That is only human nature."

Mrs. Pringle put on the smilingly helpless look at this speech, and could not muster up a reply.

That evening, before dinner, Mr. Pringle came up to his sister, and in a curiously-constrained way, said:

"Is Rotherhithe really going away?"

"Yes," began the pony, in a sort of whimpering way; "and it's very hard, after all!"

"And you think he won't go on with the business unless the cash is forthcoming?"

The pony, with all her inherited look of delicacy, felt that this was rather a coarse way of putting it, and answered:

"Oh, he likes me, of course."

"Well, we know all that," he said impatiently; "but what I mean is I, as—as your brother, you know — I should not think it right to interfere with your prospects, and think it is very hard on me—*very* hard, I say, that I should be obliged to cripple myself for the future; still, for your sake, I have no objection to join in opening the estate."

The pony gave a cry of delight, and bounded away to tell mamma and her sister.

That night Mrs. Pringle had taken her future son-in-law aside, and communicated to him, in very plain language, which she called "broad hints," that the family at last saw their way to behaving handsomely. Her son, when the matter had been put directly to him, had behaved in the noblest and most generous way, and had sacrificed his own interest to those of his sister.

The young lord listened with complacency.

"Ah!" said he, at last, "what an awfully clever creature she is! I knew she'd manage it!"

"Yes," said the mother, gratified and complacent; "she is the best of children, and will make the best of wives, though I say it."

"Lord! I meant Miss Lacroix," said the young lord, laughing loudly; "she's more brains than any man in this house, except, perhaps, Brookfield."

The young lord, however, was willing to postpone his departure for a few days. And it was now almost certain that the contract would be made.

Lord Sheerness, his father, must certainly come to the ball.

CHAPTER XIX.

PHŒBE'S ULTIMATUM.

It was now the morning of the great electioneering ball, and the preparations were complete. Everything had turned out admirably. The great personages had arrived — a duke's son among the rest, who, however, was rather common and promiscuous in his tastes, and went anywhere that gave him an opportunity of displaying his two sumptuous fancy dresses. Fancy balls hardly take place every week, or, in other words, occur but about half a dozen times in the year; so the opportunities for display become very

precious. Even these he contrived to multiply by figuring in the two dresses on the same night, going home to make a rapid change.

The great costumiers had come down from town with a whole wardrobe, and even the Charles Webbers, who never laid out money on luxuries, from principle they said, and also from lack of means, had secured the aid of the village tailor, who fashioned for them a kind of fancy costume, modelled on the coloured plates in one of the fashion-books.

The ponies were to be resplendent as the unfailing Anne of Geierstein and La Belle Gabrielle, while their mamma was to tread her own boards in a regal and stately way as Mary of Modena. Old Sam had been advised, maliciously, it is to be feared, to come out as Touchstone, and the costumier had fitted him with the fool's peaked cap, and the "bauble" and the tight-fitting suit.

Sam was always rehearsing in those

garments, and his first appearance after dinner one night, when he put his head in at the drawing-room door, and then walked up to the guests, produced the most genuine roar of laughter that Joliffe's Court had known under the Pringle *régime.*

"How many votes would I get if I showed myself in this uniform on the hustings—eh?" he asked.

Mr. Brookfield could not restrain a look of contempt, which Sam noticed; who during the rest of the night persisted in hovering about him, shaking his bauble at him, and delivering himself of Shakespearean "quips," as he considered them.

Miss Lacroix's dress was to be that of Charlotte Corday; Mr. Brookfield's, that of Henry the Fourth; while young Mr. Pringle appeared as a French knight —Dunois the Brave. His dress cost more pains and anxiety than any that had been chosen; and it was not until after many fittings on and rejection of details

that it was found satisfactory. He had been immensely excited about this costume, and perhaps was rather reconciled to his visit to town, on this ground, that it furnished him with an opportunity of arranging this mighty important matter in a satisfactory manner.

On the whole, he thought it as well to say nothing to Phœbe of the affair. She would set it down as "unfeeling;" there would be a fuss, and possibly that brutal and even odious Tom would be called in. This he shrank from, and went through his duties of attendance until the day began to draw near. He was indeed longing to get away; there was a strange restless feeling drawing him down to Joliffe's Court, and which he could not resist—a kind of complacent infatuation, which made him smile foolishly as he looked in his glass. He believed that he had without trouble gained the heart of the lady down at Joliffe's Court; that the old

impression made at the garden-gate had never been worn out; that he was, in short, an irresistible person.

Phœbe had lost much of her good looks through illness, and had a wasted, pallid air. She was silent and resentful, "sulky" her husband called it. The faithful Doctor Sparks came regularly, and declared that she was beginning to mend and would be quite strong by-and-by.

"This is the result of getting one's husband back again," he said cheerfully.

When the doctor had gone away she said:

"I watched you when he told you that, and you were not in the least pleased. Why don't you care for me? What have I done to you? I gave you all I had, and would have preferred you to any one else in the world." Then, after a pause: "Poor Adelaide Cross! Well, she escaped this! Better her fate, if even an outcast!"

He started quickly at this allusion, but she did not notice it. What instinct could have put that name into her head? she had never mentioned it during all the time they had been married? Could it be that she was beginning to suspect something?

But this was a mere reverie on her part: nor was it even addressed to him.

It was the day before the great festival; so seizing on it as a favourable opportunity, he said bluntly:

"By the way, I shall have to go away for a day or two."

"Go away!"

"Yes. Go back to Joliffe's Court. There's a lot of business: the opening the estate, and other things."

"You never told me that," she said reproachfully, the old feeling coming back for a time. "I really think you don't care to be with me, and want to get away always. Why don't you like me?"

Again the unworthy fellow resisted this touching appeal—and with a sort of weary sigh, turned to look out of the window. Phœbe and her ways were very insipid, and it was highly tiring to keep up with them. Besides she was getting better fast —and really it was very unreasonable being dragged about up and down in this way, and his interests interfered.

"Well then," said Phœbe calmly, "as you are going you will inform your relations that they will have to receive me as your wife, and that very soon. Now please, make it quite clear and plain to them. It must be done. And they will have to do it, so you may as well do it with a good grace."

Mr. Pringle felt his lips tremble with rage. But she was an invalid, she had him at this disadvantage; so he had to restrain a cutting reply he had ready.

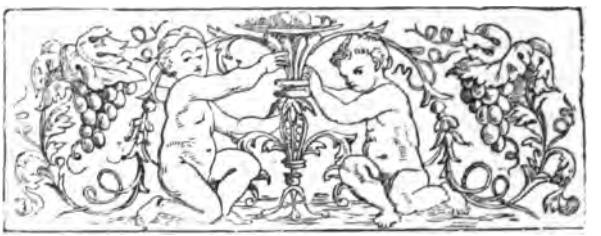
"Yes," continued Phœbe with a grave earnestness, "I see I have hitherto de-

served the name you are so fond of calling me—a child—I have been a child, a poor helpless wretched child, in your eyes. But not so foolish as you think. It was my love for you, my deep passionate love for you, that made me so wish to yield everything, to give up my opinion—except when I was at times a little self-willed. But now that I see you in your true colours I cannot be a child any longer."

He was astonished to hear her talk in this way. It was a new strain, and he had nothing to reply. But his grand dress had come home, and he could not resist trying it on in his room.

His thoughts indeed were travelling far off in a brighter direction, and he was eager to get away to a distance from this scene of pettishness and complaint.

Accordingly with a cold good-bye, he started on his journey down.



CHAPTER XX.

"DO YOUR WORST."

It was now the morning of the day fixed for the festivity at Joliffe's Court, the last of the grand company had arrived: and not a bed was to be had at the time for ten miles round. Of course the Pringles had taken the entire of the Joliffe's Arms for the night, where they were to quarter their redundant guests.

These were not many after all: but it looked a magnificent and patrician-like operation. It sounded well over the county. "The Pringles took the whole of the Joliffe's Arms for their company." A

swarm of London upholsterers and arrangers—*i.e.*, gentlemen nailing crimson cloth wherever that material could be nailed, had arrived, while Tootle and Finney's orchestra, nearly twenty strong, were actually quartered on the premises.

What had been "thrown out" by these lath and canvas architects, it would be hard to give an idea of. In every direction the house was made to bulge out on the gardens, for fresh accommodation; though the Court was a huge building and certainly had rooms enough. The decoration of those improvised chambers was of the most airy and elegant style: and the thought of the bill made even Mrs. Pringle feel unpleasant.

But the family was in a reckless mood: they were of the "weak" kind, ready to adopt a suggestion made by anybody who passed by, such as the "duke's son," and some others. Besides, was not the estate going to be opened? and then

would there not be an abundance of resources ?

Apropos, on the morning of this exciting day when the breakfast mail came in, a heavy one for such a large party, Mr. Pringle said to his neighbours after reading his own despatches :

" Only think, our son Frank is coming after all. He could not give up the pleasure. And indeed I always said he *ought* to be here."

" But his wife is ill, is she not ?" some one asked.

" Well, but you know," said the duke's son, with great earnestness and gravity, " where there's a thing of this kind, you see, really—"

" In short," said Lord Garterley, " when there's a fancy ball in the case, all other things give place. That's as it should be. Still I hope there's nothing wrong with the poor sweet soul. She is the most interesting little creature I have met; only for her

illness she of course would be here in a brilliant dress."

There was silence for a few moments, and presently the carriage drove up. It had come from the station, and brought Mr. Pringle in a high state of elation. Among his "traps" was the case containing the precious garments.

"Well," said Lord Garterley as he came in, "what news? good?"

"Oh, it was finished in time," said the young man. "I believe they worked night and day."

"Oh," said the other impatiently, "I was asking after your wife."

"Oh, she!" said Mr. Pringle; "oh, yes, thank you, she's pretty well. Where's Miss Lacroix?"

That lady was in one of the canvas chambers superintending some last touches, or rather indeed putting them herself. While thus engaged, Mr. Brookfield passed through. His face was stern.

"You have brought back Mr. Pringle," he said, "that is an achievement to be proud of."

"I had nothing to do with it," she answered calmly; "and I do wish you would forbear these unjust accusations—I repeat I have nothing to do with his return."

"It is useless," he said, "I see, arguing with you on that point—you will not understand that you are bound to exert such influence as you have over this foolish creature. It does not do to remain passive."

"This is, and will be, our favourite point of difference to the end of the chapter," said she.

"Moreover, you mentioned one day that you wished to stand high in my opinion, such as it is. But that was evidently a *façon de parler*."

"You say that," she said eagerly. "I mean it still. If you are hoping for such

a proof, I am only too willing to give it; say when and how."

"I leave it to your own conscience."

"Conscience!" she repeated impatiently. "Why should I do anything for a person that dislikes and, I believe, despises me?"

"Hard words," said Mr. Brookfield. "But," and here he drew near to her and sat down, "but really there is something very strange about your character—something in your perseverance that must in the end prevail."

"You think so?" she said. "Oh, I cannot tell you how it delights me to hear you say so. It is some encouragement for me. But I will tell you what I will do; what will you say if I leave this family at once, for good and all, go out on the world again? Would that win your approbation?"

"What!" he said, starting, "really give up your friends here—and at once?"

"This very day if you wish it."

"No, no," he said, "that would be too harsh. "But you are such a dangerous person—that——"

"I will go to Mrs. Pringle at once. They are under obligations to me, and cannot refuse if I make a point of it. The young wife shall be sent for at once, and be here to-morrow. But she shall not find me here."

"Well, that is hard certainly; but you will see that it is only right. You have really a noble nature, and I admire you: I did you wrong, and I ask your pardon for it."

"I am so accustomed to be misjudged," she said sadly, "that it can be no offence. It is my own fault, too; I have a hard ungenial nature, I believe; I was told so when I was a girl, I was misunderstood, and treated as a vindictive character all the time I was at school. I disdained to refute such unjust judgments. Ever since, this contemptuous habit has clung

to me. And as people seem to persist in misconstruing my actions, perhaps my demeanour is the cause of it, having from habit assumed what is imputed to it. Thus you see my life has been a sort of gentle martyrdom; but now you have made me happy by owning that you have a better opinion of me. There!" she added impatiently, "there again, I can see you think that I am acting a part even in making this confession."

He had in fact turned away with a smile.

"Well," he said, "now that you have made that really magnanimous concession, the next point is to communicate it with as little delay as possible. Luckily I am running up to town, I shall be there in three hours' time, and gladden the heart of the poor exile with the good news. It will restore her to health on the spot."

Miss Lacroix had drawn herself up, with flashing eyes and scornful lips.

"You say this on purpose. What, after degrading myself by such concession, is this the return?"

"It is only carrying them out a step further—the logical consequence, in short."

"How coldly, how cruelly you talk! Can you not see what I mean, that this woman is odious to me?"

"Why, what! after all the principles you explained a moment ago!"

"Not on account of herself, but because she stands in my way—takes from me what I esteem and would like. Yes, there is my confession, and you are welcome to it. I dislike her because I can see that another likes her. Come, I tell you she is not worthy of you. You know not what she is, *I* do. You have formed a sort of ideal—mind, I warn you."

"My dear Miss Lacroix (or Cross), this has been a most extraordinary conversation. I really think the best course would be for both of us to forget it as

speedily as possible, and never recur to it again."

She had recovered her composure, and gave a rather forced laugh.

"I think so too," she said.

"I declare," he said, looking at his watch, "I have only twenty minutes to catch the train. No, no," he said, "that is *un peu trop fort.* Besides, it's not consistent with the first portion of your declaration. You must own that. Well, you will carry out your promise, will you not? Come, forget our little bickerings and be magnanimous."

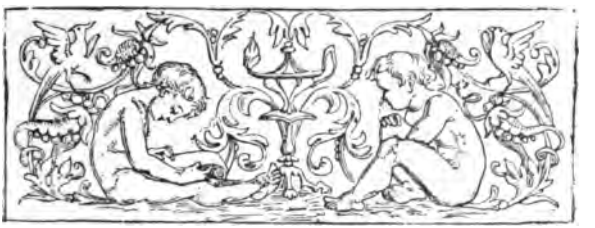
"You quite mistake me. What I proposed was with a view of gaining your esteem. You have now shown me what you think of me. I decline."

"Oh! then my expedition comes to nothing," said he, "at least as regards that point of view. But I must go all the same."

So saying, he bowed and took his leave.

She looked after him with a strained bitter glance of humiliation.

"It is ended," she said. "Rather let me begin now, as I ought to have done long ago!"



CHAPTER XXI.

A DISCOVERY.

PHŒBE was sitting in her room, looking into the fire, her pretty chin resting on her hand. Many were the long hours she thus consumed. Sometimes she fell into a little doze, and dreamed the brightest dreams, of glittering lighted rooms, in which her lithe figure was moving, set off by costly dresses. Then, as she advanced, she found herself met by dark, threatening men who warned her off. There was no friendly face — and she would awake to find the apartments prim, and hard, and stiff, and herself alone. It was hard that

she should be thus deserted and proscribed.

She remained very weak and languid. She had wonderfully recovered, sufficient to take a drive, in which, however, with all the people about her, she felt the more lonely. Poor little soul, she had had, and was having, a weary probation! O those solitary days over the fire—the little soul made for light and happiness, and all the light *bijouterie* of life, to have thus fallen on such evil lines! It was piteous indeed. That little expression with which she would smile at her own thoughts, without heeding whether any one was by, had rusted such motive power as it had, from want of practice. She asked herself often, how all this was to end, what had she done—what crime had she committed to be thus punished? Again we say, poor little soul!

It was now getting towards evening, and she roused herself. Mrs. Dawson took in that faithful chronicle of the aristocrats,

the *Court Journal*, on which she would probably have taken an affidavit with the same reverence as she would on the authorised volume. Phœbe cast her eyes over it listlessly. She did not care for the description of the marriage of "the Hon. Cam Jenkinson with Miss McSaltire," and the attendant ceremonies, or the account of the ball at Calom. But she started as her eye fell upon a heading, "FORTHCOMING FANCY BALL AT JOLIFFE'S COURT," and she read with extraordinary curiosity a full account of the preparations—the decorations—upholstery—the guests and their dresses. She devoured it almost greedily, repeating it aloud, as her way was when she was alone; for she could not read with her eyes only, but "made" each word with her delicately cut little lips. Every dress was set out—how the duke's son was to be clothed (his two dresses), how Mr. and Mrs. Charles Webber—"Ah!" she said aloud, "so they are there, what

fun it would be to see them! And Lord Garterley as Falstaff! Oh, that would be droll!" and in spite of her gloom she laughed outright.

But what was this?—"Mr. Francis Pringle's dress, that of a French noble, will be one of the most tasteful of the whole, being rich and becoming. It was partly designed, as many of the costumes were, by a lady of great taste and accomplishments, Miss Adelaide Lacroix, who has been for some time stopping at the Court."

Phœbe read to the end in a sort of stupor.

So this was why he was so eager to get away from her—the "business" that obliged him to set off.

And then this Miss Lacroix who was coupled so oddly with his name? For she had an instinct—oh! such a true, straight instinct, as all women must have—that there was something more than mere accidental relation! Who again was this Lacroix—who was "*Adelaide* Lacroix?"

the sound had a familiar chime—it was nearly like one that had sounded long ago in her ears and sounded so disagreeably too. Suddenly she gave a cry. "Lacroix: Cross! Adelaide Cross! I knew it! It is she!"

How long she sat looking at the page, she did not recollect. She was roused by some one entering.

"Mr. Brookfield, ma'am, wishes to see you."

"Yes, yes," said Phœbe passionately, and almost catching at him as he entered. "You will tell me about it. Oh do, do!"

"I have come to tell you about it," he said, sitting down in his calm way. "I find that you have a great enemy down at Joliffe's Court, to whose efforts I really believe your exclusion is owing—"

"I know," said Phœbe eagerly. "Adelaide Cross, or what is the double dealing name she has taken—"

"Lacroix. Yes. What I have come

to tell you is, that at this moment her feelings against you are stronger than ever. So the time has come for you to act."

"Yes, yes," said Phœbe; "I wish to do so—I must——"

"May I advise you?—you recollect that I did so on one little occasion when I first became acquainted with you. I assure you I have a deep interest in you, and wish to help you, but you see it is a delicate matter."

"I understand," said Phœbe piteously, though she did not exactly. "What am I to do? tell me, and I will do it."

"Take the matter into your own hands. Present yourself at your father's, they must receive you."

"The very thing," said Phœbe, who had an indomitable spirit beyond the frail and delicate frame that enclosed it. "Once there I shall know how to behave. But how am I to go? who is to go with me?"

"There is your brother Tom, he is just the person. But lose no time: set out at once. Take the advice of one who is a sort of protector."

"Thank you, oh thank you," said she. "And you are going now?"

"Yes," he said, "I must, I have business. But *au revoir* for the night."

Phœbe, when he was gone, looked after him from the window, and nodded to him when her pretty eye caught his.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PLAN.

He had scarcely been gone a few minutes when Tom appeared.

This was so welcome a surprise that she screamed with delight as she ran to him.

Tom folded her in his arms, and kissed her again and again.

"My pet, my treasure!" he said, "you look pale and worried. Oh! all this must end. I'll see to it."

"Oh! Tom," she replied, "such an idea has come to me. That good Mr. Brookfield suggested it, that I should go down

and take my place, and let them turn me out if they please!"

Tom laughed.

"Not a bad notion. And do you know what I have found out? They are giving a tremendous—"

"Fancy ball? I know, Tom."

"Set of curs! The meanness of this persecution. But I'll deal with them, never fear. They were too quick for me once before, but shan't be a second time, I can tell them."

"When shall you be able to go, Tom? You'd come with me, wouldn't you?"

She waited for his answer, her delicately cut lips reflecting and trying to anticipate what was in his thoughts, like ripples; so on those mobile lips you could read her own, they quivered with such an airy tremulousness.

"Go? When? Let me see. We'll go to-night—now!" said Tom, slapping the table.

She clapped her hands with delight. Married as she was, she was still a girl, and with more congenial surroundings would have relished a bit of fun at any moment.

"Nothing easier," continued Tom. "No time for a fancy dress now, but no matter. Put up one of your best ball dresses, you can robe at the nearest inn. Let me see, it's now seven; start at nine, and we'll be at twelve—in the room, I mean."

Not a moment was lost. Phœbe was presently busy with her maid—the disputed maid—selecting a dress. There was her hair to be done, but done it was, and with rapidity, and when Tom returned, there she was with all packed up, and in a sort of trembling state.

"Come along," cried Tom. "Here's a cab; where's the box? Now all in, and away we go."

Down in the train he said many times:

"Won't it be fun when old Sam sees

you dancing opposite him? He'll rub his eyes, won't he? Make out Brookfield first, and get him to bring you in. Send in for him."

"They'll recognise me in the hall, won't they?" said Phœbe timorously.

"Leave it to me, then. I'll send in myself for him. Then that—well, as he is your husband, I'll say nothing of him."

There was a time when Phœbe's eyes would have flashed, and she would have done battle like a little bantam for her husband. Now, any speech of the kind did not seem to offend her. She wondered at it herself.

A little after eleven they found themselves at the Joliffe's Arms, where carriages were waiting, and a great crowd gathered to see the gaudy dresses as they emerged. Phœbe was inclined to stop and watch with the rest, but Tom soon contrived to obtain a room, using the Pringle name ("she was one of the family," he said, "and no one

could gainsay it,") and there Phœbe made her toilet. It was not a very complete or regular one, but it did fairly well, and would pass considering the hurry and the circumstances. Then they emerged. It was but a short way to the house. There were plenty of cabs and carriages, and they were soon at, or close to, the great door of Joliffe's Court. It was with a nervous feeling that Phœbe surveyed the walls and battlements of the imposing place that one day she was to call hers. Awe-stricken, she said hurriedly to Tom:

"Do let us get down before we reach the door, and let us walk round and look in at the windows."

A little astonished at this change, Tom agreed. They got down and walked round. As we have said, the process of "throwing out" in the shape of alcoves and pavilions had been carried on all round with needless abundance. From many a window on the ground-floor canvas en-

closures protruded, some being of wood, with windows, through which the interior, lit up and decorated in blue and white stripes, could be seen. There was a large number of these little boudoirs, each tenanted by a small party in the theatrical dresses.

Never was there such a glittering illuminated scene. Phœbe was enchanted, and though a little nervous said :

"Now, Tom, you can go for Mr Brookfield. I will wait at that green-house door."

Tom went his way. Phœbe approached cautiously, wishing to peep in.

The green-house was illuminated with the usual Chinese lanterns. It seemed deserted. But just as she turned away she saw two figures, one "on the arm" of the other, coming down the centre between the rows of flower-pots, and making for the door, from which a few steps led out upon the lawn. Phœbe drew aside into the

shadow. They passed quite close to her. She was sure it was going to be "great fun," but ought she to listen ?

What! was she sure that her eyes could be trusted ? Was that her husband ?

Yes, there he was, with a devotion and insinuation that he had rarely exhibited to her, fervently pleading—and to whom ? In the dress of Charlotte Corday, but grown, finished, with the air of a woman of the world, stately and animated—there was Adelaide Cross.

Phœbe knew her at once. This was the meeting of the two girls after that long interval; and strangely enough, there came back on Phœbe, at that moment, Adelaide's defiant words at parting: "She must not think that her behaviour would be forgotten."

She would not rush out and interrupt them, although she longed to do so. No, she would stay and listen—hear every word.

They stood in the moonlight on the step.

"But I cannot listen to you," Adelaide was saying. "You have followed me here, and I tell you to go away."

"I understand," he said, "as I have understood all along. I have not forgotten our old vows we exchanged at the garden-gate. Nor have you, I think, forgotten them."

"How good that is," she said, with scorn; "you that so basely deserted me, and——"

"It was not my doing, as I have so often told you. I was blinded — I was taken in by the prattle of a child."

The listening "child" was near uttering a cry, but she restrained herself; she longed —thirsted to hear more.

"What is the use now of such thoughts, even were all that true? It is too late now."

"No," he said, dropping his voice —

"not if you—not if I speak plainly," he whispered.

"What! the scandal of an elopement! out of the question! Well, it is really a sort of compliment that you have proposed such a thing to me."

"But——" he began.

Now, at last, Phœbe could restrain herself no longer, and stood before the pair.

The former school-girls looked at each other fixedly. But their characters seemed to have been transposed. Phœbe was composed, and even stern; while Adelaide seemed confused and humble.

It was she who spoke first.

"You heard what we were saying. It is a fancy ball, recollect; and people talk in character."

"This is your revenge then," said Phœbe, looking at her fixedly, "after that long time! It is pitiful, very pitiful."

"As I live," said Adelaide, "you misjudge

me; indeed you do! It was another reason."

"What one?"

"I cannot tell you that."

No one seemed to expect explanations from Mr. Pringle; even Phœbe seemed to regard it as a folly that was in character.

"I shall not say anything of this," said Phœbe firmly to him. "But you must bring me in — give me my place. This night is suited to it. Come!"

He was quite cowed and confounded, and obeyed.

"It was nonsense and folly," he began to murmur—"a joke."

"Hush!" said she; "and you come also," she added, addressing Adelaide; "or I shall disclose what I have heard."

"Perhaps they will not accept your story."

"Mr. Brookfield will. He is here I know. I shall tell him, and he will know how to make me be believed."

Adelaide turned away her head; then said with a forced smile:

"You must have your way this time."

They set out through the green-house. As Phœbe emerged from the dark foliage of the shrubs and ferns into the blaze and glitter of the ball-room, she was almost bewildered amid the shifting, crossing figures, so richly and gaudily attired; she could not distinguish faces or recognise them. So they swept by as the music crashed out, and it seemed like a noisy garish dream, or something out of fairy-land.

But she knew that good-natured voice that came from the huge portly figure of Sir John Falstaff.

"What! don't you know me?" cried Lord Garterley; "and you here at last! Well, that's only right. Where are you going now? Have you seen Sam—old Sam?"

"We were trying to find him," said the dazzled Phœbe.

"Ah, there's Mrs. Pringle, she will do as well. Take your wife up to her at the top of the room."

Seeing that he hesitated, Lord Garterley said :

"Well, come with me ;" and led the way through the crowd.

Mrs. Pringle, smiling at every one, the queen, as she fancied herself, of the assemblage, was little prepared for the person which Lord Garterley was bringing to her. She had almost quite forgotten Phœbe's appearance, and though there was an irregularity in the costume, still it but made it the more probable that it was some distinguished being the peer was introducing.

This was being *très distinguée*, and what she found by rueful experience was likely to be the mode a great personage would adopt to show their quality. So she produced her stock of smirks and simpers of reception. Then it dawned upon her,

and a look of anger and annoyance took its place. What did this mean? But Lord Garterley was not to be denied. He was overpowering.

"Here is the right thing at last; met your son bringing his wife into the room. Make it all up, receive her. See—every one is beginning to look," he added, in a lower tone; "there will be such a talk and scandal; if it gets into the *Post*, your ball will be spoiled."

It was such a night of good-humour, and things were going so well, and Phœbe was so smiling and pretty; and the hostess so helpless, that Mrs. Pringle put out her hand; and Phœbe having wrung it affectionately, took her place by her on the daïs of her home.

"Now I must find Sam for you," said Lord Garterley.

But this was a more difficult task.

While he was away Mr. Brookfield came up in the black velvet and purple dress of a Venetian senator.

"You have taken my advice," he said, "and it has answered well, you see. In fact, from the beginning, I think all my counsels have."

Phœbe was in such a flutter she could hardly reply coherently. Then she was one of the family at last.

"But," she said, naturally looking at him with unconcealed delight, "how well you look in that dress. I mean, how well it suits you!"

And here was old Sam led back in his fool's dress. So grotesque and appropriate was it, his stout contour being brought out hardly effectively by the tight-fitting dress, that Phœbe could not help laughing. But what was it that was over Sam to-night? He was constrained: his jests lacked humour or rather spontaneousness. So with Mrs. Pringle—every one noticed that her smiles were rather forced, and wondered that on so great a night which redounded to the honour of the family, they were

not on the pinnacle of exultation. Nay, was it not known in the room that through the intervention of Lord Garterley, who had at last done something practical and unselfish, a great magnate had promised his vote and interest to Sam—a support that was likely to turn the election?

When Sam came to Phœbe, all he said was:

"Well, you're there are you? You can stay as long as you can; that's as much as I can say."

Then Phœbe's old, rehearsed speech came back upon her, and she said:

"Oh, if you would let me show you that I can be your daughter—"

"Oh, humbug!" said Sam roughly; "keep that for the novels. Hi! along here we go; clear the road for the future M.P.!"

And away he set off with his favourite antics.

"Pity Sam makes such a goose of him-

self," some one said (a remark made nearly every day); "to-night his fun seems to hang fire."

"It's a low style of fun at the best."

Thus the guests commented on their worthy host. Again our pretty Phœbe knew not what to make of all she saw. She was in such delight—in such a dream! One thing was certain, there she was restored—established—given back to her place. No more trials, none of those cruel buffets of fortune—bills—"tradesmen in the hall;" nothing but wealth and happiness.

Alas for this last! She thought that this might come after all. Where was he? He, too, might change. But could she ever be the same to him after what had passed? She turned away from the thought with a sort of shudder. Where was he? where had he gone? Where was she?

Adelaide was not far away. There were the hostile eyes, regarding Phœbe as though with the murderous purpose the

character she had assumed once entertained.

There was rage, defiance, dislike in that glance. Phœbe returned it, with confidence. At that moment Mr. Brookfield, the Venetian senator, was by Phœbe's side, and the next he was walking about with her on his arm.

The sight of Adelaide kindled the gentle Phœbe's anger. She became excited, and poured out her little soul to her companion.

"See her," she said, "how she watches me! She has been determined on my destruction from the first day."

"What, Miss Lacroix?"

"Yes! Adelaide Cross, her true name. I believe she changed it merely for the purpose of contriving these plots against me, so that if I heard it I should not recognise it."

"Not unlikely," said he; "an ambiguous name is a useful thing."

"And to-night—do you know what I discovered?"

The eyes of Adelaide were still watching them.

"What was it?"

"Why, as I came round the house outside, I saw two figures come out of the green-house; they talked, and I could not help overhearing them. One proposed—oh, that I should have to tell it!—that they should elope, and she, what do you think she said in answer?"

Adelaide had come up quite close.

"So you are telling him," she said. "I know well what you are saying. But you are the one responsible."

"I?" he repeated.

"Yes, you—you defied me, recollect. Besides, there is less harm in my relation than in yours, recollect that. I do not care for *him*—well, you understand me, I see."

He did not reply for a moment. Then said, in his quiet way:

"You ought not to stay in this house any longer. Indeed, you cannot after what has passed."

Phœbe said haughtily, "I will take care of that."

"I will save you the indignity," she answered, "of being worsted in the struggle, as you were before. Your fast friend Mr. Brookfield will tell you that I intended retiring of my own accord, should you ever come upon the scene."

With this speech Charlotte Corday haughtily withdrew, and left the pair.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DANCING ON A VOLCANO.

WHERE was Phœbe's husband all this time?

Consumed with mortification, jealousy, rage, and even fury, the younger Mr. Pringle had rushed to his room, where he had flung off his fine dress, in which he had dreamed he would produce so amazing an effect. All was annoyance and confusion.

What affected him most was the entrance and establishment of Phœbe. This might seem incredible, but so it was. He was destined to be mortified by her and

hers, in every way. Every one, all the world, seemed to be on her side.

It was now about half-past twelve, and he flung himself out of the house and went straight down to the Joliffe's Arms, which was lit up and full of people coming and going.

"What, you down here, Mr. Pringle?" said the landlord; "left the gay goings up yonder?"

He was answered with an impatient ejaculation, and ordered to bring brandy —the usual thing—to the public room.

And there Mr. Pringle consumed a good share with an expertness which showed that it was a matter of habit with him, all the while marking the time with an impatient stamping on the floor. So he continued for about half an hour, by which time the room had cleared and he was left alone.

Suddenly there entered some one who started at seeing him. It was Tom. At

the sight of him, the sense of all his wrongs inflamed Mr. Pringle to fury.

"You here!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. Why not?" said the other; "much droller to find you here."

"I suppose you want to begin your usual bullying, but I won't stand it, I warn you; I have had too much of it from the whole gang of you."

"Not from Phœbe, come?"

"No; I have had a way with her."

"I believe you," said Tom, giving way to a long pent-up rage; "for once you can speak truth. You have made her life wretched—taken away all her spirits, her bright smiles, her hope; and I think you are proud of it too—you pitiful cur."

"Don't talk to me in that style, cur your self. I'll train her yet before I have done with her."

"You shall not," said Tom fiercely; "that threat is quite enough. From this time forth, if I hear of or suspect a harsh

word used to her, I'll come from whatever quarter and make you smart for it."

"You shall not," said the other.

"I shall, though; and I've a good mind to take you in hand this moment and give you a first lesson."

Trembling, scowling, half afraid, and yet goaded into bravery, the other answered:

"You daren't!"

In a moment Tom had seized a riding-whip which was lying on the table, and clutching his unworthy brother-in-law by the collar was cutting him smartly "right and left" as it is called.

Mr. Pringle there and then received as sound a thrashing, not "as he ever had in his life," for he had had none, but one that was a novelty to him for the suffering it caused him. He howled with pain and rage; feelings that were increased when he saw the landlord and waiters, who had rushed up, standing in the doorway.

In this punishment was the force of all Phœbe's wrongs expended; and Tom dealt his cuts with that thought to inspirit him and nerve his arm.

Tom, when he felt fatigued, flung him away as it were; then coolly went and got his things and prepared to depart to catch a midnight mail train bound for town.

Somehow the innkeeper and his waiters seemed to understand, for they never offered to interfere. They had seen Tom arrive with his sister, who, they had learned, was the Pringle parents' daughter-in-law. It was a family quarrel, in short, of a rather *prononcé* kind—that was the whole. The past grievances of months had found a vent.

The "thrashed" young man remained for some time having more brandy, and brooding over his wrongs, muttering threats of vengeance; then rose up, got his hat, and staggered to the door, saying

"he would bring the fellow to an account for this treatment."

The landlord remonstrated, and the waiters tried to detain him; but go he would.

It had now come to being close upon three in the morning, and it was time for the great Pringle ball to break up. It had been more an irregular than a successful performance, distinguished by a little of the disorder that attends most public festivals of this kind. To our Phœbe it had been an enchanting night, full of delighted bewilderment; she had danced—she had looked on—she had walked about—she had talked with Lord Garterley and all her old friends, now "transmogrified" in strange dresses; and who were all charmed to see her. She had forgotten her sad fate and the causes of it.

At last, here was the close, with the supper—the dancing all over—everything coming to an end. The guests began to

drive away home in the daylight; the guests at the Court went to their rooms. The long pavilion, strewn with shreds of dresses, green leaves, droppings from the wax candles, was empty. The supper-room bore the appearance as of a sack having taken place. The lights were being put out by the tired and yawning servants. A stray guest or two were still in the hall lighting a cigar, proposing to walk home, cloaks covering their "trunks and swords," and in Mrs. Pringle's room the host and hostess were standing, their faces close together, and some open letters in their hands.

Sam, still in his clown's dress, looked strange enough; and Mrs. Pringle was in her robes of state—the head-dress she had tossed aside. The tableau was most grotesque; Sam's anxious and worried face—red and crumpled—bent over to the lamp. Mrs. Pringle rather scared and helpless.

"Oh, it's a mistake," she said.

"It's no mistake," he said. "I felt that it was coming—all along. That fellow's threats had something in them."

"Oh, I won't believe it!" said Mrs. Pringle. "It can't be."

"Don't be a fool," said Sam, in his polite way; "isn't it plain enough here."

"Read again then," she said.

Sam read out laboriously:

"ALLEN *v.* PRINGLE.

"SIR,

"We are instructed to inform you on the part of Messrs. Allen, that they have discovered that there is another will of the late Mr. Joliffe in existence, of a date subsequent to that of the instrument by which the Joliffe's Court estates were devised to you. Mr. Allen, senior, always entertained this view, being persuaded that the testator wrote the supposed last will and testament, as one of the many capricious dispositions with which he amused himself.

One of the witnesses to this instrument is dead: the other has only recently come forward.

"The document itself was deposited among the papers at Joliffe's Court. It will be found in one of the pockets of a letter-case in an envelope labelled 'Schedule of Fixtures,' one of the testator's devices for concealing his proceedings. We give you notice that we require you to produce this said lost will and testament now in your custody; failing which, we shall act as we shall be advised,

"Yours obediently,

"POTTER AND SHARLEY."

Mrs. Pringle said not a word for a few moments.

"Oh! It seems as if there was something in it."

"It's an imposture—an attempt to extort money—they want to have their mouths stopped. I'll take no notice of them, that's what I'll do."

"But then you know, Samuel," said Mrs. Pringle, in alarm, "the letter-case?"

"That can't be found," said Sam, with a peculiar laugh; "searched the house from top to bottom, ransacked everything! No, we are quite sure it can't be found. Do they take us for fools?"

But Mrs. Pringle seemed to have received a shock; she went to her bed very thoughtful, perhaps with the awful presentiment that the crown was tottering on her head.

Such was the night of the grand fancy ball at Joliffe's Court, long remembered in the district.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DESPERATION.

THE gathering at breakfast in the morning was like the rout of a regiment. Many of the guests were exhausted by the labours of the night, and did not appear; one or two had gone: and more were going.

Mrs. Pringle, who was in an excited state, viewed these signs of dissolution with consternation. It seemed like a version of "The Thanes fly from us!" though she was unacquainted with the passage, or with little more than the name of the play.

"Going away! why, we'd planned all sorts of things for to-day."

There was a recklessness about Sam that was remarked by some. Neither he nor his spouse seemed to attach much importance to the presence of Phœbe.

"Oh, so you're there," he said; "well, how did you sleep through the night; feel pretty fresh this morning?"

"Oh, yes!" said Phœbe, all smiles and delight.

"That worthy husband of yours, I suppose, has bolted; went off last night in a sulk."

But it was impossible not to notice the nervous manner of the various members of the family, even of the ponies, who were desperately clutching, morally, as it were, at the *prétendant*, Lord Rotherhithe. The young nobleman, now that the pecuniary arrangements which he considered indispensable to his happiness had been as-

sured, had shown himself in the capacity of a sort of passionate lover. So that the pony whom he favoured had begun to think that "she was actually being loved for herself alone," and that after all, even if Sam could not or would not provide the cash, her lover had become insensibly so attached, that, rather than thus lose her, he would be content to sacrifice his interest. In this pleasant delusion she came to breakfast, and having heard what was making the rest of the family uneasy, smiled in the consciousness of her assured position.

"If you think that really," said her mother, in council, "no time ought to be lost; the day ought to be fixed, and the matter got over."

The pony agreed with deceitful complacency. Phœbe had come running to them in delight.

"You will have me as your sister," she said, "and now will not think any more of

what is past? That is agreed, is it not? At least I won't think of it——"

The others answered with natural indifference, "Oh, certainly!" but they were thinking of other things.

"By the way," said one, "what did Francis tell you? Where was he going?"

"He never tells me anything," said Phœbe sadly.

Suddenly she turned a little pale.

Miss Lacroix had entered the room. Phœbe often told what was passing in her mind at that moment. She felt so happy in being restored—and the world, as it were, opening freshly before her—that she was eager to go up to Adelaide as she had done to the ponies, and say—"Adelaide, I shall try and forget last night;" but the look of hostility in Adelaide's eyes checked her.

"Are you going to stay here?" said Adelaide, in a tone that corresponded with her glance. There was scorn and incredu-

lity, and a sort of threat, beginning, "If you do——" or, "Better not——"

As Phœbe owned, in later days, she could not refrain "if she were to be killed," from taking up the challenge. She read at once the whole situation, and it flashed upon her like an inspiration that the whole had been an organised system of revenge.

"I hope to remain a long, long time," she answered, "and never go away again. We are all made up happily."

"There's an answer, Miss Lacroix," said Mr. Brookfield, who had just come up with Lord Garterley and some others. They were all going away in an hour or two.

"By the way," said Phœbe, "why are you Miss Lacroix? You used to be Miss Cross—and that not very long ago. Isn't it odd?" she said, turning to Mrs. Pringle and her ponies.

"What!" said Lord Garterley. "Two names. How singular!"

"They are the same," said Adelaide calmly; "the same in meaning, though in a different language."

"Of course!" said Lord Garterley, "you have resumed the old family French name. Many persons have done it. Thus Buggins becomes the more elegant 'de Bogynes.'"

"But her family is not French," said Phœbe warmly; "not a bit of it—a plain English one."

"She is right," said Adelaide. "The only reason for the change was that it suited me."

Mrs. Pringle and the ponies were looking at her in much astonishment. They said "it seemed rather odd. What was the meaning of it?"

Phœbe looked at both with a maliciousness she could not suppress. This was her work. The other did not condescend to give any further explanations.

Suddenly came up Sam with the same worried look upon his face.

"Here! come with me," he said to Adelaide; "I want you. Come in to the study—now do. Look sharp, Miss Lacroix," he said.

This sounded strange to the party that had been just discussing the name.

Adelaide noticed their looks of intelligence, but followed without a word. Mrs. Pringle remained.

In the study he closed the door, took out the letter he had received the night before, and put it into her hand.

He looked at her ruthlessly as she read it.

"I just thought I'd get your opinion on this. It's plainly a put-up thing, eh?"

"What do you mean by that?" she answered.

"Attempt to extort money—frighten—and all that. You know what plain English means?"

"I should say not, from one thing. How strange! The description is accurate."

Sam, to whose ideas the situation had imparted an unusual vivacity, looked at her rather aghast.

"Why, how can you tell? What d'ye mean?"

"You ask me, recollect. I say that all that description of the letter-case, etc., happens to be correct enough."

"Why," said Sam, rising slowly, and a perspiration breaking out on his forehead, "you don't mean to tell me that you know anything. Speak out, can't you?"

"I grieve to tell you, but the fact is this, I did notice a letter-case like the one described, with the paper labelled 'Schedule of Fixtures,' while——"

"What! you—you—!" burst out Sam in fury—"take care. You're in league with them. They've bought you, and you want to ruin me. You infernal, treacherous schemer! it was an ill day that I let you come under the roof."

He walked over to the window, beating his old forehead, and then seemed to have recollected himself. As he turned round Adelaide was struck by the curious "leer" of affection.

"Heaven forgive me for what I have been saying, and to my best of friends! I beg your pardon—I do indeed. But I'm not myself, from the fright of the thing. Only think, for people of our wealth and position to have it all taken away in a moment! The idea itself is enough to make one's blood run cold. Forgive, honeybird, say you do, my beastly, brutal language. You will?"

Adelaide made no reply, but a smile of toleration.

"It is for me to ask your forgiveness," she said. "Alas! I am speaking the truth."

"No doubt—no doubt your are, my pet," said Sam, whose manner had become disagreeably fawning. "I dare say there is such a paper among the rest, and a

dozen more to the back. I have seen them myself. Though, as for looking for it now, at this time of day, or striving to put one's hand on it, you might search for a needle in straw. Isn't that so, my pet?" he added, with almost piteous pleading.

Adelaide shook her head.

"I fear you do not understand me as yet."

Here there suddenly entered Mrs. Pringle and her daughters, all very austere and stern.

"I am glad I have found you here, Miss Cross or Lacroix. I must call on you for a full and clear explanation of this suppression. It has nearly brought discredit on our family."

"Hush!" said Sam eagerly; "let her alone. We are at business now. What does it matter what she calls herself. She's our best friend."

"That's very well. But, really, before all the company to have such an *exposé*

—an *alias!* It will be the talk of London."

"*Will* you be quiet," roared Sam, "you foolish old woman, and listen to me? I tell you I won't have her worried and bothered. This is her house as long as she chooses to stay here. She is our friend, and has always shown herself such. Am I not right, my dear?"

"I fear you will not think me so, after what only a sense of duty and conscience had compelled me to tell you."

"On the contrary, it's quite right," said Sam, "and I admire you for it. But there's nothing in it—no, nothing—all turn out a delusion." And Sam went towards the door.

There was something in his walk, or in his eyes, that made an impression on Adelaide.

"Now," she said, "I must further implore you to be cautious, for your own sake. Take care what you do."

Sam looked at her irresolutely.

"Yes," she said, "I must tell you that I could lay my hand upon that paper now —that I read it—and that it seemed to be a will. *So it would be no use your doing that.*"

Sam understood, and with a suppressed oath turned away.

Mrs. Pringle looked from one to the other.

"What on earth does it all mean?" she said.

"It's a plot, a wicked, infamous plot to ruin us. Where is it? Give it up—into my hands."

"Come with me, then," said Adelaide. "But, first, listen. As I stand here, before Heaven, I knew not until you told me that there was anything in this. I thought it was some rough copy of a will."

"You canting, conscientious wretch, hold your tongue! No, I don't mean that. I don't know what I am saying. Forgive me!"

"But," said Mrs. Pringle, now fully understanding, "Adelaide dear, you won't destroy us—we who have been only too kind to you? Only think, turning us out on the world! Oh, it's absurd, ludicrous," added Mrs. Pringle, as though moaning. "What would Lord Garterley and our other friends say?"

"I can't help it," said Adelaide coldly.

"What have we done to you?" said Mrs. Pringle, almost frantically. "What motive is there in all this?"

"Yes, what is the reason of all this?" cried the ponies piteously.

But Adelaide was silent.

"I can say no more than what I have said. Were I to conceal it, it would weigh on me even to the day of my death. I should be sharer in a conspiracy for depriving others of their rights. I feel it as much as you can do. Have I not, myself, to go out upon the world?"

So saying, she left the family in a wretched state of misery.

Could there be imagined such a situation? The glories of the previous night still fresh—the gorgeous *débris* of the festival not yet removed—the delicious bewilderment and excitement of the hosts scarcely yet subsided: and now, there comes a something like the cold touch of the "fell sergeant!" With this sense there was a horrible instinct of *certainty*—even through all the mists and obscurity of the revelation—that there was truth behind! They felt under sentence, and cowered. Oh! was it not cruel, deadly, wicked, unendurable—the work surely of some malicious, demoniac spirits? They could have cast themselves down on the ground and wept with rage and grief.

While they were thus looking at each other, with faces aghast, Mr. Brookfield appeared at the door.

"I was coming to say good-bye, and

thank you for all your hospitality, when I met Miss ——, well, Cross, I suppose we must now call her. It would be affectation to say that I am ignorant of all that has been going on. I was content to go away without speaking, but a sense of justice for the innocent obliges me to come and warn you."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Pringle rather wearily.

"Well?" said Sam eagerly. "Tell us all about it."

"Nor should I say it, except in the presence of the lady herself."

"Here is the lady herself," said Adelaide Cross. "But don't—I implore you, do not. Don't you be one with the rest to fling a stone at me!"

"Why should you be spared?" he said with contempt; "it is full time that this unmeaning course of deception—for which you have selected me as the object—should be exposed. From the beginning you have always addressed me as though entitled

to some especial privilege or favour at my hands. Now I begin to see the meaning of it."

It was astonishing what a change seemed to come over Adelaide as she listened. She assumed a piteous and imploring attitude.

"Not from *you*," she said. "I do not deserve it."

In the same strain he continued:

"This is melodrama! The whole is too transparent. Your ingrained longing for revenge against this poor child, dating from a little quarrel at a school—for shame!—has driven you on to this shocking exhibition of hatred and malevolence."

"You are unjust—cruelly unjust to me," almost faltered Adelaide. "Spare me this abasement. Leave it to them!"

He smiled.

"Absurd! Mrs. Pringle," he continued, "you must take care as to receiving her statements. I know well what prompts her. This lady has been baffled in all her

designs by one that seemed a child; and now, I blush to repeat it, she tries to bring about the ruin of the whole family that has sheltered and aided her so long—all to gratify this spirit of revenge. So that she injures *her*, she does not care if she ruins you all! I could not have believed that there existed such depravity!"

Adelaide stood there with her eyes closed, as though trying to shut out some vision that was before them. Again she repeated:

"And from you!"

"Now," continued he, "I would have you be on your guard. Be cautious as to every step you take; and let the first one be to tell her to begone from the house, and at once! You must not remain an hour longer under this roof," he said, turning to her. "Go!"

"And leave you to watch over *her*—as guardian, a would-be guardian," replied Adelaide, in slow, measured tones. "That

is what you would wish. Don't think that I cannot see what your plan is. You want the reversion; but you will have to wait long. Lives thus watched for are slow consuming."

Without being in the least discomposed by this allusion, Mr. Brookfield motioned to the door.

"I take no orders from you," said she, almost with ferocity.

Just at this moment entered Lord Garterley in his travelling-dress, but with an air of consternation, and looking round.

"I am glad she is not here. You must not be alarmed," he said; "but it may only turn out a slight accident. If you would come this way, Mrs. Pringle."

"Good Heavens!" said that lady, in feminine nervousness, and not knowing what blow now the next moment might bring; "tell me what it is. Don't frighten me."

"Last night, it seems, your son was

thrown out of a gig as he was coming here, and I fear has been hurt."

"Where is he?" cried the agitated mother, and flew from the room.

Lord Garterley and the others remained.

"I fear it will be a serious matter," he said. "It seems he had taken a little too much at the inn, and then set off home. He was only found this morning, lying on the road. And they brought him back, not knowing who he was. His poor little wife is with him now. I fear his injuries are too serious for him to recover from."

Here Adelaide Cross almost uttered a cry.

EPILOGUE.

One of the most desponding settlements on the earth is the little enclosure of Calais, which used to be, and is now to a certain extent, a sort of large Marshalsea; so bleak and desolate, so straitened and grim, and monotonous. The fortifications and gates suggest the idea of a debtors' prison, and the little square seems like its yard. The place, with its queer little by-streets, and recollections of Brummell and Sterne, has a certain fascination for those who pass through "once and away" as it is called; but for those whose stay there is enforced, the air of the place is depressing.

Even now those straitened in means and oppressed with debt repair there for shelter; for, in French phrase, your economies are to be made there, and the rather decayed hotels and pensions swarm with these seedy exiles. Sometimes there are little fêtes, when an orchestra is erected in the great *place* and the shabby-genteel emerge from their burrows. Faded ladies with their daughters sit on chairs as though they were at the band at the "Horticultural;" smile and bow to acquaintances, and chat with the red-legged officers who are quartered there, and well-nigh dislocate their jaws with repeated yawns.

There is now in the month of August, 1875, some such little festival; and there are ladies thus seated—a mamma and her daughters—and we can hear the voice:

"Oh! this miserable place; what can you expect? You recollect, my dear, the ball we gave in Berkeley Square, when Lord Garterley came to us, and all the ambas-

sadors; we gave a fancy ball later at Joliffe's Court."

A stout, jovial-looking old gentleman in a little round hat and rather shabby clothes, is standing next the ladies.

"They talk of it still, I know," he said; "and if I could scrape the funds together to go to the House of Lords, I'd have the whole thing reversed on appeal; Cooper and Co. assure me of that. Eh, my dear, didn't they say so? Come with me, my dear boy, into the Boofay and I'll tell you the whole story; one of the most iniquitous, blackguardly decisions ever given in a court. If I had the fellow here I'd choke him."

And "old Sam" certainly looked as if he would do so.

Such is the case of our friends the Pringles — the Parvenu Family. Mrs. Pringle goes on with her recollections:

"We heard of a wedding to-day that is to be—my poor son's widow about to marry for the second time; an excellent match—

plenty of money I believe; I am sure I hope she will be happy. And you, dears," she said, turning to the ponies, "by the way you heard about that girl that disliked her so—gone into a community I think."

"Yes, ma!" said the elder pony, engaged with a red-legged officer; "joined an Anglican sisterhood."

Mrs. Pringle tittered to her friend.

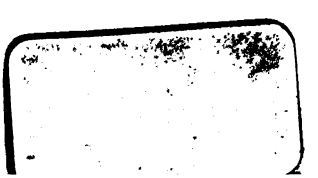
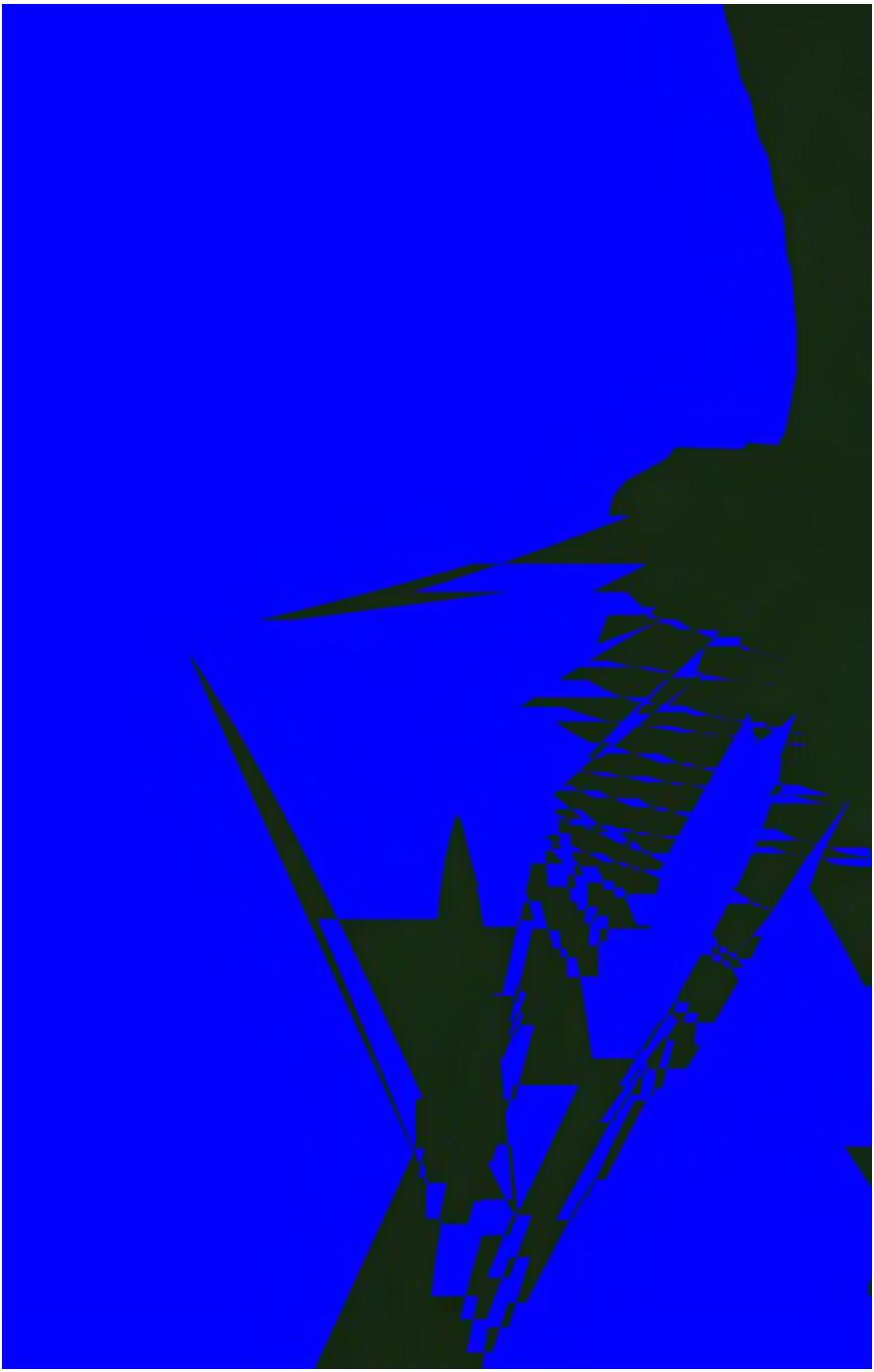
"Yes, absolutely. But she will give them trouble, I suspect; as well I remember she had a fancy for this very gentleman—had she not, dear?"

"O yes, ma," said the pony impatiently.

A few nights later—when Calais wakes up at midnight to receive the crowd of figures that arrive by the boat, and that move in a shadowy procession on to the railway, scarcely bestowing a thought on the little town save being struck by the picturesque towers and illuminated clocks—two figures passed on with the others. The Pringles had then gone to rest in their

cramped lodgings, and never knew that there had passed so close to them Mr. Brookfield and *Phœbe*, whose fortunes now promised to be bright again.

But for them, as for all who had ever come in contact with her, the problem remained: *What was Adelaide?* Was she independent and misunderstood? false or genuine? the creature of events, or of her malignant passion? Was she cold and hard, one that would not condescend to vindicate herself? Little problems that often perplexed Mr. Brookfield and the other characters whom we have encountered in this narrative. Both views—the favourable as well as the unfavourable one—are left open and submitted with all respect to the reader's speculations.

THE END.

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